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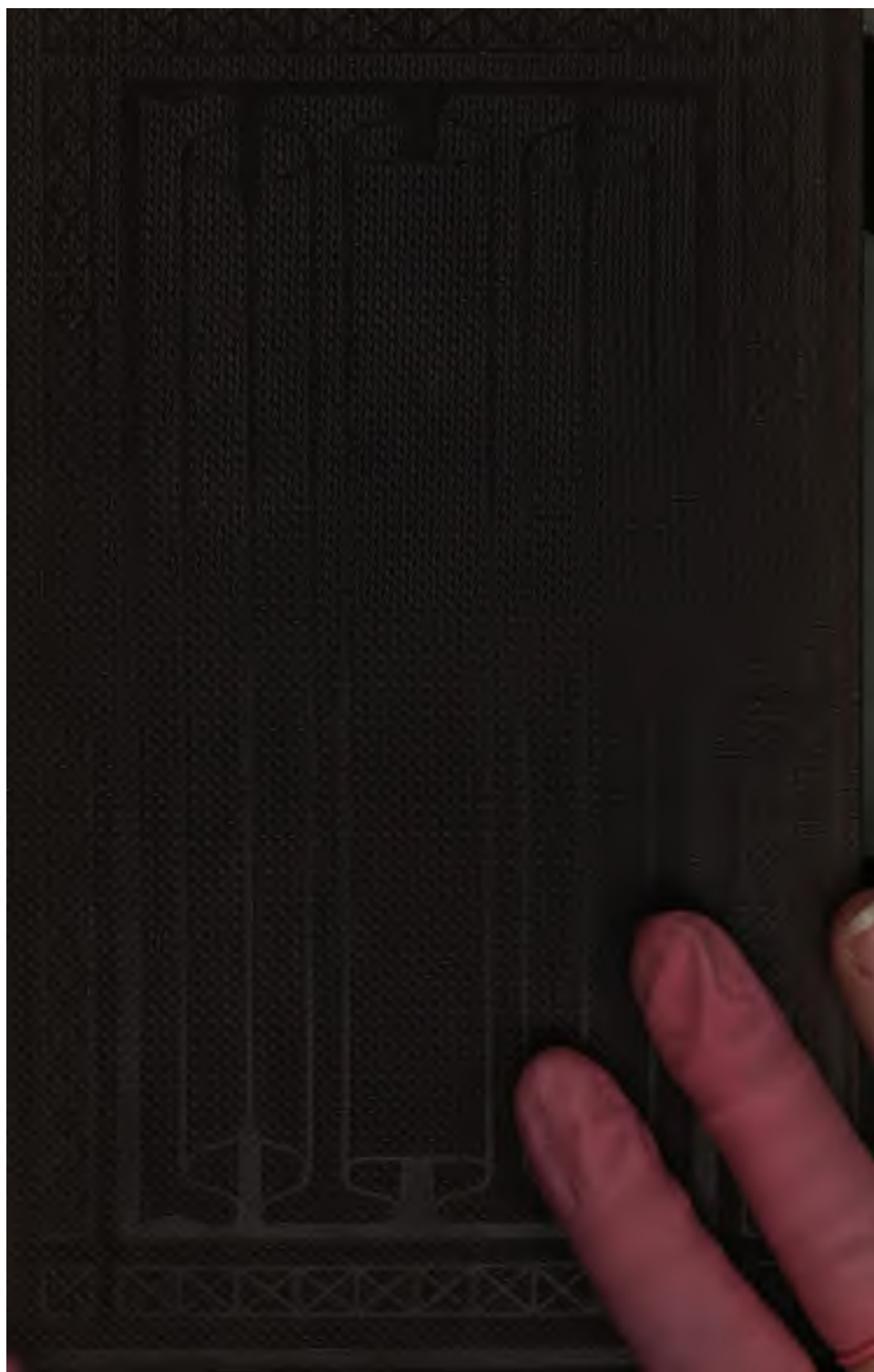
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THE
HALLOW ISLE TRAGEDY

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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THE

HALLOW ISLE TRAGEDY.

CHAPTER I.

LOGAN RECEIVES A SOCIAL CALL FROM THE LORD OF THE MANOR
—THE PARSON'S INGENIOUS DISSERTATION UPON EKES—
ALSO UPON THE LETTER K.

WINTER was now at hand, and the removal of the family into town put an end for the present to this part of the controversy.

The day before they were to remove, in the afternoon towards evening, helper Fletcher being absent on duty in a neigh-

bouring island, Effie gone out for a walk, and our parson alone, who should he receive a visit from but the laird.

Although a dissenter, my friend had the true parsonic regard to the lord of the manor, and as this was his first social advance to a better acquaintance, the surprise was agreeable, and Logan exerted himself in proportion to lay, as he himself might have phrased it, a good foundation.

Accordingly, half an hour or so after, when Effie came in, accompanied by Miss Deerness, whom she had met in her walk, they found the gentlemen improving the occasion over a tumbler of toddy. How the parson grinned (at being thus quasi-caught), and said, "Come away, ladies!" Since the death of old Mr. Deerness about a month had elapsed to soften the memory of their loss. Without stopping, therefore, to consider very minutely whether the visit

was a compliment to his church, Logan took it at least *quoad sacra*, and as such, an orthodox reason for another tumbler.

Effie and Miranda then, seated in the ingle nook, had the pleasure of listening to an animated (though grave) and exceedingly edifying conversation, which Logan ingeniously found the means of prolonging. The last drop of tumbler No. 2 was trembling on the tip of our parson's tongue—it was gone—and he said :

“ Sister Effie, I think we have done so well—it is not often I indulge—but I think we have done so well, we could not permit our friends to go without drinking an eke to the roof-tree of Hallow. In our father's time, as you may remember, one and an eke was the rule from which he never deviated ; but there were a few great anniversaries which he acknowledged as exceptions. These, indeed, are not now appli-

cable to our day. No longer required as lights to our faith, they have withdrawn, so to speak, from the social circle, and have taken their place in history. But I think the present is one." There was a slight want of perspicuity and connexion about the conclusion ; however, he seized the bottle, and the eke was achieved to a demonstration. "What is there to laugh at so immoderately, sister?" inquired the parson. Any marked expression of that kind Logan always distrusted.

"Nothing," replied Effie. "I was only going to say, had you given me time, that I highly approve of ekes ; I think them very pretty and playful—like the cat and the kitten, you know."

Miranda and her brother laughed at Effie's bon mot ; and the parson grinned.

"Just so," cried Logan,* plunging with

* I beg to note here that my friend's enthusiasm over the

animation into a more elaborate exposition of the eke, its essence and its uses. "For first, if you observe, there's a meaning, a charm as it were, in the very word. EKE. Literally *also*, or *in addition to*, as the term is used in deeds and other old writings. But in the social or moderately convivial sense, although the etymology is the same, the meaning is greatly more full and significant. Here it signifies *extension* or *link*, perhaps *link* comes the nearest. There is something elevating in the thought that our pleasures are not isolated, that they are linked large and small alternately, and this large and small is the beautiful provision for their continuity." (In the mono-

bowl was in a great measure platonic; he did not very often indulge; but he showed his good sense not to set his face against the custom. In a moist climate, that could boast of such comotators as Markus Skeldar of Long-Annot, the Laird of Dropogrog, Trigilgas of Kipperness, Logan was wise to set an example of moderation, knowing that there were teetotallers going about.

logue Logan could occasionally be as imposing as the Bard of Highgate.) "Just so came ekes to be introduced into our cups. I appeal to Miss Deerness whether in the sister mystery of tea it is not always a cup and a half, two and a half, three and a half, as the case may be—always the half! For example, were I to say to my friend Clapperton I had a tumbler with so and so, what moral impression would that leave if it stopped there? a tumbler! No doubt a tumbler is in itself a very good thing, but what I mean to say is, that no possible proposition, or problem, or mental exercise, can attach to your telling that you had a single tumbler: it is simply a tumbler, and nothing more: in the drinking of it you may not have exchanged three sentiments on any one subject worth the sugar. But when you say you had a tumbler and eke, or two and an eke, you

secure your hearer by rising at once into the suggestive."

"Of another tumbler," said the Master.

But the parson was in full force, and not to be caught: he shook his head waggishly. "No, no, my dear Master, we have done wonders, but we must not get fou all at once—perhaps the great occasion may come—it would be sinning against our ekes not to wait for it."

When a man is more than ordinarily happy, he is almost always sure to be figurative in his language: my friend had been figurative all night, and he continued so to the end.

"Effie," said he, "since our friends must go, hadn't you better order the lantern?"

Countermanded by the Master. "He did not think they should need the lantern, as the moon must be up."

“ That was soon seen,” the parson said, and to the door they went accordingly. They were just in time to see the sight; the moon was rising between Venturefair and the Residuary Isle—most beautiful, most melancholy! The full round orb, soon to be received up into the clouds, wore that almost conscious expression more observable in these northern latitudes than elsewhere at the close of autumn, when the storms of winter are drawing near. It was the first time Logan had seen the moon in Orkney, and, with his hands in his pockets, he stood a good while staring her hard in the face: at length he awoke from his reverie.

“ But come, Effie,” said he, “ we are detaining our friends.”

“ Hadn't you better get your hat,” said Effie, “ if you intend going a bit of the way ?”

Of course the parson intended going a bit of the way. "Ha!" cried he, clapping his hand to the uncovered part—but that was soon remedied—he ran in and got his hat. Returning, he bowed and offered his arm to Miss Deerness; nothing could have been more customary or commonplace than the proposed arrangement, but there was a briskness about it, or in the manner of it somehow, and like a very young girl, Miranda blushed, hesitated, and showed symptoms of a risible tendency.

"What's the matter?" said her brother, making a joke of it: "it's only another form of the eke, you know." And Logan laughed obstreperously. "Capital! first-rate! it was the best thing he had ever heard." Upon the whole, Melethor began to think there was something in the reverend young fellow, and the arrangement

was carried—the parson in advance with Miss Deerness, and Effie bringing up the rear with the Master.

He spoke of Logan, praised his social qualities, and said he liked his quaint humour: and then that Logan and she would be dull when they were all away.

Effie said she supposed so; and being no fine miss, she began to ask some questions relative to the said putting over the winter. Among others, she was specially desirous to know about “the old man who comes to church in the old-fashioned light-blue coat—the old man with the showily dressed daughters; what sort of people are they?”

“Oh, you mean the Henderlands of Peri-Point,” said Mr. Deerness. “They are quite superior young ladies: they know the world, and have been once or twice to Kirkwal. They are, I fancy, bits

of fools, poor things. Their father, James Henderland, is a very decent good old man, who submits to their finery as fathers, I suppose, must. However, they're not bad girls—foolish and fond of dress, and all that—but they are the daughters of a sterling honest man, and I can confidently recommend them. They'll talk as long as you like, and help you to put over the winter."

"I suppose," said Effie, "it's very black, the weather here, in winter?"

"Oh, most devilish," he replied. But he appeared to be thinking of something else. How it came to pass I do not know—whether through the natural potency of ekes, or of Logan's ingenious dissertation upon them—but at this casual allusion to her winter prospects, he seemed to draw nearer to Effie: first an arm stole round her waist, then a hand

took her under the chin, and then he kissed her.

“There are just yourselves, two, I believe?” said the Master.

“Just.”

“Has your father been long dead?”

“It’s going three years,” said Effie. “He was a merchant in the Salt-market of Glasgow.”

The Kelso convoy (particularly when rendered to one’s own landlord and his sister) is, perhaps, the oldest and highest social tribute that can be paid; and our parson returned in an excess of irrepressible glee to his own fireside.

“You had better put away that bottle, Effie,” said he, rubbing his hands. “We have done uncommonly well for one night, don’t you think? I never in the whole course of my life met with anything so completely unexpected. I had just come

in. I was not exactly in low spirits—I make a point, as you know, to guard against that—but I was a little dull and despondent, and, to tell the plain truth, in the act of boiling the kettle to make a cup of tea for myself, when, to my astonishment, he came in. I believe I looked caught and foolish enough. I had not the remotest expectation of its turning out the friendly thing it has: a complete success, there cannot be a doubt about it, and an encouragement in future not hastily to prejudge. He has not as yet definitively declared on our side, but he has declared off on the other. I know that for a fact. Altogether, I begin to perceive clearly that my destination is Orkney, after all. I consider such a man as this Melethor Deerness the forerunner of a host; and then, so far from being the conceited personage represented by Bland (who, by-the-by, is al-

ways lamenting that class of failings), he is really a very unassuming, companionable young man. You remarked the becoming deference with which he declined entering into argument with me ?”

Effie gave a brief assent, for conscience’ sake. She had remarked, but drew rather a different conclusion from the circumstance.

“ Altogether, I consider the prospects most promising. The ground must yield according to the culture, and there is good society ; our friends here are a sample. By the way, the sister is a very agreeable person.”

“ Harriet is very pretty,” said Effie.

“ Well—yes—certainly she is pretty,” admitted the parson ; “ but it is not exactly that I mean. The Christian struggle, whether in its past or present forms, is not exactly the A B C of girls, but, her

youth considered, I found her extremely intelligent and well informed on the subject."

"I thought her rather a little deficient there," observed Effie.

"You are in a mistake. I assure you she is not; in some respects she is perhaps superior to yourself. I don't say that she has read or heard as much as you; but she has thought, or will think, more. She has naturally more of the religious juice—if I may so express it—more impressible, more implicit, with none of that tendency which you have to stick dry questions into the most solemn truths." (Logan always took a good mouthful of the word TRUTHS.) "I really was greatly taken with her. It is seldom one meets with a young person of so amiable a disposition: what do you think?"

The question was put with a slight

cachinnation, or challenge to Effie to guess.

“ I really don’t know,” said Effie.

“ At parting,” said Logan, drawing in his breath, “ she gave me a k—a kiss, you know !”

“ *Gave* you, Logan ?” said Effie, archly.

“ Well,” said he, “ I *took* one, and she let me ; it comes to the same thing.”

“ It seems very odd,” said Effie, “ but the same thing happened to myself with the Master ; he took a k too, and I somehow did not like to hinder him ; it would have looked so—what’s that word you used to have at college—muffish ?”

“ He did !” said Logan, the cloud of thought gathering on his hitherto complacent brow. There was silence for about a minute—a full minute—and then the metaphysician spake.

“ Effie,” said he, in his most impressive

manner, "I have just been thinking over that kiss of yours—we must guard against mistakes here, Effie—it is not, and cannot be the same thing as mine."

"Where's the difference?" asked Effie, not thinking him so serious.

"In the first place, there's the difference in the intention."

"You only assume that," said Effie.

"I was about to say that I waive that; a more serious defect in your disfavour is, the heirship. Do you comprehend?"

"Not the least."

"I will endeavour to explain," proceeded Logan. "As in our law of property, so in that of nature, there is a fixed principle, by which the succession of everything is determined; there may be exceptional freaks, but as a general rule, you find this to be the case. Now, the law of heirship is, that there are only two directions, one

upward, the other *downward*, by which all the favours and what are called windfalls of fortune reach, or are transmitted to us; and if there is one initial upon which the law is more plain than another, it is the k,—a kiss is just what it comes to,—and either they *ascend*, or they *descend*.”

“ I don’t see that,” said Effie.

“ But they must !” cried Logan ; “ there is no other way they can reach us—given two channels, they must come by one or other—the proposition is as plain as any in the primer. Bless my soul ! are you so ignorant of how things come to us, or as some say happen, that you never before heard of the ascending and descending principle ?”

“ I think I understand,” said Effie.

“ Think ! it is as clear and evident as noonday. Well, then, here is the distinction between our k’s. Neither of them

are as yet anything. At most they may be on the way. In my case, the ascending chord—yes, chord's the word—in my case, I say, the ascending chord is struck, in yours the descending: now I know something more of mankind than you, my dear Effie; it is rarely that such men as Melethor Deerness descend at all, but when they do, they don't *begin* with a k; and, although I should not say that just at present there is any great probability of my ascending by marriage with the sister, still it is not impossible that such a thing may come to pass: it is in the heirship and course of things."

It would be an ungracious as well as a difficult task to say how much of all this was dictated by fraternal affection, how much of selfishness there lurked beneath, unknown to my friend himself. Effie had no suspicion of the latter; she merely said

to herself, "I never expected my kiss to come to anything. Logan needn't have been at so much learned trouble to tell me that." Nor did the conviction, demonstrated as it was to a Q. E. D. by the triumphant logician, spoil her night's rest.

Their friends were to sail in the morning. One is apt to pass over such twopenny friend-partings from the dread of chronicling small beer; and yet they have an interest—the swipes are not bad. For my own part, if there is anything ever gives me a heartfelt fit of gravity, it is when I see the dependent in a bustle, and uplifted about nothing.

As was the case next morning at the manse.

"Our friends are going to have a fine passage," said the parson, popping his head into his sister's room before she was up.

“They’re not away?” Effie called out after him. She huddled on her clothes, ran to the window, and looked down, and saw Logan standing outside without his hat, feeling the weather on all sides with his hand. It was showery-looking, but upon the whole fine—bare and blowing as one expects at that late season of the year, with, in general, a clearly made out and well-dinted distance.

Again at breakfast :

“I suppose,” said the parson, “our friends will expect us to see them off.”

“Surely,” said Effie, “we must go and look after the k’s, you know.”

“The what?” said Logan, a little startled; he thought she had said the *keys*, until, bethinking himself, he remembered, and with a grim smile allowed the joke to pass.

Fortunately, too, Captain Kith made a

run over to see his daughter (Charlotte being a famous hand at baking the buttered cakes for breakfast which made the captain's teeth so white), and being thus apprised of the hour of sailing, they were relieved of the necessity of going at a venture. They were to sail at eleven o'clock precisely, the captain said; and accordingly, giving themselves time for a leisurely walk to Sandy Haven, brother and sister set out from the manse at half-past ten precisely by the minister's watch. The capricious little chronometer, I need not say, was again in full favour, my friend having long since forgiven that trick it played him about the coach.

They had not much talk by the way, but I find this incident, that, contrary to their common practice of walking separate, the parson caused Effie to take his arm. Knowing my friend so intimately as I do,

I should have considered this as merely a formal tribute to the occasion, but Effie thought there was more in it: as a pantomimic intimation to Miss Deerness of his present conjunctive mood, Effie could not help laughing to herself at the little manoeuvre.

The family were already on the quay. They were cheerful, but not hilariously so, and there was the usual attendant bustle and turn-out to see them off. Mrs. Deerness and Harriet took an affectionate goodbye of Effie.

“Bless you, dear,” said the former, “you will be very dull, I am afraid, when we are away. Once we are fairly settled down in Kirkwal you must come to us for a week or two. Your brother, I am sure, will spare you——”

“What’s to hinder the minister to come for a week himsel’?” said the Jollyboat.

A gratified bow from Logan admitted that by-and-by, perhaps, his pastoral duties might allow of such a relaxation.

The adieus of the young men were characteristic of each: in his brotherly way, William Institute whispered a number of little laughing things in Effie's ear; Mr. Weatherby in dandified silence, or thinking of something else; Jerrold with both hands and a good-by approaching to a bellow; little Grouse with a slight hysterical sniff; and the Master, who was the last to step on board, with a brief, full, and erect good-by.

In a few minutes they were on board the yacht—the bright sails were spread to the wind—they were gone; and the parson and his sister followed slowly along the shore, looking after the *Brenda* as long as she was in sight. The name was a fancy of Harriet's, who, knowing the pride he

took in his new yacht, got Melethor to christen it after Brenda Troil rather than after herself—Brenda, she argued, being such a pretty name for a yacht. But why not Minna, asked he—was not Minna still prettier? Ah! no—any name rather than that. Poor Minna!

CHAPTER II.

EFFIE MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE LADIES AT
PERI-POINT.

THEY walked on, Logan in a strange jumble of a reverie which his biographer would be rather puzzled to unravel ; Effie picking up shells, and listening with a kind of dreamy pleasurable depression to the sound of the wind as it swept along the thistly braes, or, with fuller rebounding intonation seaward, drew her eyes once more after their friends in the *Brenda*, now a distant white sail.

At length the parson spoke.

"I wonder what is keeping Fletcher. I expected him home yesterday."

"Is Mr. Fletcher to be long with us this time?" inquired Effie.

"I do not know. His stay will depend upon circumstances."

"You must not be angry, Logan, but there is something that strikes me as not right in your having anything to do with this man."

"The man," replied Logan, with some emphasis on the word, "is, like myself, a clergyman labouring in a cause which I am sometimes tempted to think hopeless enough. I feel obliged to you for the compliment implied in your remark."

"You misunderstand me," said Effie; "there is a difference between this man and you, and a wide difference too, I hope."

“I know of none, excepting that he has neither home nor sister to compensate him in some small degree for the toil and disappointment he undergoes.”

“But his moral character, Logan? Think what a risk your own runs if there should be anything wrong with that. You will tell me that my suspicions are narrow and harsh—that he is the brother of my most intimate friend. Ah, poor Mary! Kith has picked up strange stories.”

“That shall be remedied,” said Logan; “I will discharge her as soon as we get home.”

“But I tell you that Fletcher——”

“Is a clergyman,” interrupted Logan, sharply, “that I will teach you and the whole island to speak of with the respect due to my helper. What! has it come to this, Effie Morland? Is this the way you judge a servant of God by taking in all

the vulgar and malicious gossip you can hear, and through the channel, too, of an idiot servant-girl, whom I vow, by our father's memory, to discharge as soon as I get home."

"But you will have to pay the girl her wages and board wages," said Effie, in hopes that the hint would moderate his rage.

"Don't talk to me of such trash!" said the parson. "I'll not pay her a penny—not one penny-piece!"

"But it's the law," said Effie, "and you will be compelled; what, else, would become of poor servants?"

"Will I be compelled! we shall see: I rather fancy," said our friend, "that I am the law here, or all that's for it. I have a call to make here, and I beg that this unprofitable subject of discussion may be dropped."

The call here referred to was at old James Henderland's of Peri-Point, which, with its well-filled stack-yard and garden before the door, reminded Effie more of a snug Scottish "town," or steading, than anything she had yet seen in Orkney.

Entering by the garden gate, Logan's ear caught the sounds of animated discussion proceeding from a bower at the further end of a sort of terrace in front of the house, a frequent resort, as he knew, of James's daughters. Stepping along for the purpose of introducing his sister to the Miss Henderlands, what was his surprise to find Fletcher, his helper, stretched at his ease with the ladies of Peri-Point, and in such a position as to infer a most suspicious appearance of his having his arm round the waist of Jean the eldest!

"I fear I am an intruder here," said

Logan, with frowning brow and compressed lips.

“Oh dear no, sir, not the least ; father was expecting you, Mr. Morland,” cried the girls, all more or less in a bright hectic blush : their constitutions, poor things, were as delicate as their minds were ill-regulated.

Logan bowed with cold dignity, and declined the half-proffered invitation to join them.

“I thought, Fletcher,” said he, “that by our last arrangement you were to have been in Corbysholm yesterday, and back last night.”

Fletcher had as usual some excuse. The weather was not very favourable, and he was not very well.

“Dinna say that, Mr. Fletcher,” said old James Henderland, who at that mo-

ment made his appearance in some haste, a stooping figure, his cheek flushed, "the weather was weel enough, and so were you, had you been but as willing. I offered to let Peter and Alic put you across; but a grane's a useful thing in a gude cause, and easily got up. I am glad you are come, sir," he added, shaking hands with Morland; "I was just thinking of sending for you to come, and skell this idle college. To the house, women, and see what meat's makin! The minister will stay his dinner."

James was a consumptive-looking old man; he had an inveterate stoop, and altogether a heartless, broken-down appearance, that gave little promise of his taking up the matter with so much spirit; but his patience, Effie supposed, was exhausted by the doings in the bower. She was greatly taken with him, and the more that,

like herself, he was an emigrant from the dear Cameronian banks of the Clyde.

At dinner, Effie's impression of his character was confirmed. His conversation, enfeebled by constitutional apathy or from other causes, bore, nevertheless, traces of a good early education. On sacred topics, which, of course, formed a large portion of the table-talk, James exhibited more historical than speculative lore; he was as well acquainted as his young minister himself with the blood that had been shed in past times, but he had no argument to found thereupon, no system to build. James was, in short, a little behind. He could understand the bluff old way of dying for the truth, but in the refined subtleties of modern controversy he was deficient. He appeared to have drifted out of the religious world altogether, and sunk into himself. In politics, however, he was

pithier than Logan could have expected, and as good a Whig as himself; nay, in this matter he appeared to go even further than our friend, and to doubt whether there were any Tories in heaven at all.

He spoke almost like a contemporary of the martyrs, so much had he their lives at his fingers' ends (this peculiar manner was occasioned, Logan understood, by some great early sorrow); but he hardly knew what was meant by their deaths as orthodox triumphs, and James neither blew nor cared to hear that trumpet blown. In a word, his creed (for Logan had to bring him to the point) was more remarkable for its brevity than for its length or breadth. "He believed that the present movement was sent of Heaven for the healing of the sects."

"You mean, Mr. Henderland," said the parson, "that *we* are to absorb the various

differences of opinion, and that, *under us*, Christians of all denominations will be embodied into one grand Church of Christ."

Now, James Henderland meant no such thing. He answered modestly, however, that he did not see so far before him as that—plainly intimating his doubts of the all-absorbing power of the new Church, or how far such an arrangement would do. But, confident of being able to crush James at any time in half a sentence, Logan forbore to push the well-meaning weak old man.

Leaving the minister and James to their *single* tumbler, Effie made the acquaintance of the Miss Henderlands. The girls had all the faults that might be expected of suppressed female finery in such a Patmos. Solitary, vain, senseless, and sensitive, and full of extravagant spirits when they had the opportunity.

Their grand topic at present was the loves of Fletcher and Jean (their eldest sister). They asserted positively that Jean was the loadstar that brought Mr. Gideon so much to Peri-Point, and Jean, of course, denied, but with a shrill volubility that appeared to Effie to leave the matter in some doubt. Nor were the others behind with their own individual loves to complete the tale; it was a family failing. Janet, the youngest and best-looking, was talked at in connexion with a name that brought a deep blush into the poor girl's face, and caused Effie's honest cheek to burn with indignation—the name of Mr. Weatherby Deerness.

“Only think, Miss Morland! the handsome, the peerless Mr. Weatherby, the greatest toast in Orkney, and, what's more, the greatest flirt; all the belles in the mainland could not catch him; who would

have thought it of our Jenny's apron-string !”

From Jean, Effie learnt privately a little more of this romance. Jean was the oldest, and any little sinking fund of sagacity they had for their guidance was treasured up in her. The greatest fool among them set her down to her own affairs, she was by far the most sensible, in her judgment, of the common stock.

“I do believe you'll think us fey, Miss Morland,” said Jean. “Ower muckle laughing and joking—it just distresses me to hear them whiles. But there actually is something in what they say about Mr. Weatherby and our youngest sister—she's only seventeen. They have had meetings—several to my knowledge. What their courtship's like, or what Jen sees to lippen to in the young man, I canna say; but this I know, that

since she took up with him she's nane the happier at hame. They are great folk by the like of us; and for the young man himsel', they may praise him for his good looks and all that, but Raby Deerness is a kind of gomeril I could never conceit." (*Conceit*—that is, trust or have a good opinion of.)

On the whole, Effie liked her new friends very well. They were silly and vain, but perfectly natural, pleased with her, and promised to come and take tea with her the first fine afternoon.

CHAPTER III.

EFFIE HAS A REMARKABLE DREAM.

THAT same night Effie was visited by a dream. At first it bore the ordinary relation to passing events, but in the end assumed a terribly distinct character. Produced, no doubt, by the recent departure of so many friends, the weather was represented in Effie's dream as excessively bad—wet, comfortless, and disheartening—no getting out of doors—and any little news coming in, not much better than the

weather. They heard that old Crawtaes was dead at last, and another appointed in his place; and as Logan had given up preaching and had turned farmer, they were going to hear the new man in preference to helper and successor Fletcher, who was still preaching at the Haven chapel, but in a feckless and back-going way. So far, all this was obviously suggested by passing events, with the exception of my friend's turning farmer.

But here all relation to passing events ceases, and the dream would appear to deal with events to come.

They were at church, hearing the successor of old Crawtaes—who, by-the-by, proved to be their great friend Bland, the same mellifluous, smooth-tongued gentleman as ever—when, in an instant, preacher, congregation, and all vanished, and the diminutive Gothic church expanded over

the dreamer's head into a castle like the Castle of Otranto.

It was late in the afternoon, almost dark, indeed, and a profound silence reigned in the vaulted apartments, of which the dreamer was apparently the sole occupant. Passing from one into another, she could see her shadow reflected in the black marble floors; and these mirrors also showed her that she was in her night-gear, and barefooted. It was growing very dark—she began to feel uneasy—she listened, and heard the noise of a stormy night gurgling and whistling without. A little further on, feeling some heavy rain-drops, she looked up and saw the sky through a large breach in the roof and part of the wall. The building seemed here as if it had been cloven by a thunder-bolt, or smashed in by something still more dreadful; and the sky, as seen

through the gap, covered with flying clouds, was wild and dreary in the extreme.

A sudden chill along the floor apprised the dreamer that a door must have been opened somewhere. No footsteps reached her ear, but she knew that some persons were approaching—she felt a shivering certainty that they were near; they passed her so close by, that she noted their dusky figures quite distinctly—two men bearing the body of a third, and followed at the interval of a few steps by a fourth, that seemed from its drapery to be a female. Instinctively the dreamer felt bound to follow, not so much guided by the sense of sight as by certain warm spots in their track, readily distinguishable by the sole of the naked foot from the rest of the cold marble floor. At length the procession halted, and the dreamer also stood still.

Next appeared a small rushlight suspended by an invisible thread, and by this feeble glimmer the dreamer discerned a sitting figure that, until it spoke, might have been mistaken for a statue of white marble, so perfect was its resemblance to the work of the sculptor; but, as the procession again bearing the body forward was about to pass, the seeming marble moved, and the dreamer heard a voice say, "*Set him down.*" In the same instant the chamber was strongly illuminated, and the whole disclosed—an open grave, from which the light streamed up, the old laird sitting in his dead-clothes, his two elder sons with the body, and that sable-cloaked figure following with clasped hands so terrible to look upon. The dreamer awoke with a terrified scream, and the name upon her lips, "Mrs. Deerness!"

The clock in the lobby struck six, the cock outside replied, and the Castle of Otranto disappeared.

Effie was not a serious believer in dreams, but this one perplexed her greatly. She told it to her brother, who of course laughed at it. "A pure phantasmagoria," he said; and denied the possibility of its having any prophetic authority.

"Authority, no," said Effie; "I don't suppose that dreams can be of any authority, but may they not be a presage for all that—a gathering—just like the fairies, you know—of thoughts when we are sleeping, that, keeping singly by themselves, we are hardly conscious of when awake?"

"Hey!" says the parson, "what's this of it, Effie; do you mean to challenge me to a bout of metaphysics?" So, the metaphysician declining, the wit replied, "No, no, my dear Effie, put all such mischievous

thoughts out of your head ; they are, as you say, like the fairies, and not to be trusted."

Well. The third day after, in compliance with some instructions left by Mrs. Deerness, Effie sent her maid, Charlotte Kith, up to Hallow House to put the covers on the drawing-room chairs, &c. She had intended going to see this done herself, but the Henderlands called to spend the afternoon, and so Kith was allowed to go alone. They spent the afternoon, Logan saw the girls home in the evening, and Effie went a part of the way, looking for her handmaiden Charlotte.

She parted with her friends at the head of the small lake, about a quarter of a mile from the manse. Already the country people about were beginning to call it Loch Manse. Enclosed all round by

green pastoral heights, the pale sheet of water looked tranquillity itself with the twilight upon it, flavoured by just a puff or two of peat smoke from the neighbouring cottages. While Effie stood admiring the coots in the reeds, a sudden commotion among the sheep above caused her to look up, and presently the figure of Kith came flying over at a pace which, the squatness of her build considered, seemed to presage something extraordinary.

“What is it, Charlotte?” inquired her mistress. “I see you have something strange to tell me.”

The odd girl, holding her panting sides, replied, “Gie me breath first, mistress—I’m fair done. Nya now, then, Miss Effie, you’ll never let me speak a word o’ the diel, but an I have not seen him this day I’m a bundle o’ claes and nae woman !”

“Nay, but take a breath, Charlotte—you will hurt yourself,” said the mistress.

“Let my years be doubled,” continued Kith, “and let me be docket for my sins in the Black Pool o’ Misdroddom that they used to dook the ald wives in lang syne an I speak not the truth. It concerns the laird—gude keep it never get to the leddy’s ear, for it would drive her wud.”

“Come home,” said Effie. There was little risk of eavesdroppers about, but it might be as well to hear Kith’s story indoors.

And so, having the manse to themselves, Effie listened to her colleague Charlotte’s extraordinary narrative of what she saw in Hallow House after her dusting was done.

“Oh, impossible, Charlotte!” said her

mistress. "They could not deliberately plan such wickedness—and Mr. Raby—oh, impossible! You were tired after your dusting and fell asleep, and were dreaming. What you saw was all a dream."

"I was sleeping nane," said the captain's daughter. "I was as waken as I am now. And I saw Mr. Raby and the creepin worldly wreater creatur, Jan of Cappernairn, and the Fair Isle men (twa glowerin ill-deedy-lookin whittles they were) looking on, and the image of the late ald laird sitting in 's chair. I saw it all, mistress, as plain as I am telling you."

Effie was greatly perplexed what to think, but as the girl was a notorious dreamer at her work, she told her not to mention to any of the neighbours what she had seen. She resolved to wait for more light—to be guided by circum-

stances. "Surely," thought Effie, "if all these men were on the island somebody must have seen them."

Next day she had a call from Jean Henderland. Jean said she had not time to sit down, as she was going on business of her father's to the south side of the island—perhaps Miss Morland, if inclined for a walk, would accompany her; and Effie, who liked a long walk, agreed. It was a fine, quiet, dull day, and they went by the Brodds of Kirk, an extensive high-lying solitary common, where you may wander a whole day and meet with nothing but the shadows of the clouds passing overhead.

"You'll never have seen the great Hurlit valley yet, I'm thinking, Miss Morland?" says Jean.

Effie said: "No, she had not."

"You'll see it the day, then. It's a

muckle bonny valley, and 'gude pasture for cattle, but yet it's a swither to me the thought of it."

"Why?" asked Effie; "what's in the valley you speak of mair than the bents where we are walking, that you should swither at it?"

"It's the promotion," answered the laconic Jean.

Effie saw that she was arranging her ideas for a communication of some kind, and therefore let her take her own time.

She asked Effie whether she had seen Mr. Weatherby lately? Effie had not. "I thought he might have given you a call," said Jean; and out it came at last.

"It was late last night—the worship, in fact, was over," said Jean Henderland, "when, to my astonishment, he called. He said he had come from spending a day with the new laird of Brok, and was on his

way back for another day or two. I thought him the waur o' drink mysel'; he was certainly excited. But he says he'll marry Jen as sune as he gets Hillhurlit, and that Melethor can't keep it from him much longer. If we were once through this cut," said Jean, "we should see the valley."

Effie certainly was a little startled at the extent of the said Hurlit valley. "It's as much as one can see across it," she remarked to her companion. It was warm walking for the season, and the whole place was profoundly still. Jean Henderland pointed out an old house at some distance to their right as the remains of the old castle. "The last proprietor who lived in it," said Jean, "had a funny by-name. He had been a thriftless, useless kind o' body it's like, that listened to everybody's advice, and sae they called him Lugs."

"Ay!" said Effie, "I've heard of the name. Can you tell me why it is that they call Mr. Raby Lugs' Heir?"

Jean looked surprised for a moment; then, with gathering frown, replied:

"Do they call him *that*, Miss Morland? Do you mean that in the family they call him by that byword habitually?"

"Not habitually," said Effie. "I only heard it once. I don't think you like Mr. Weatherby?"

"Who—me?" said Jean. "I have neither liking nor disliking to the young man. I am only sorry for my poor sister. I was not aware—I never heard till now—that he was so spoken of in the family."

"Oh, young men's banter," said Effie, who saw that she was hurt.

"That may be," returned the sombre Jean; "but young men's banter's no lairdship: if *they* jeer him that gate, I

doubt this will turn out but a Lugs' inheritance when all's done."

"But what is it," said Effie, "the story of this heirship?"

"Well, there are different ways of telling it, but in the main," said Jean, "it agrees to something like this. The last proprietor that was independent in these lands here—I have heard his right name, too, but I forget it—he that got that ridic'lous name of Lugs—outleaving his failings, he was a proud kind o' body in his own way, so when his kinsfolk (that's the ancestors of this present family) wanted him to make all one property of it, Lugs said no to that—they were his nearest of kin, and he would not put it past the family—but he left a will vesting it in the then second son, so that the land and title might still be kept up distinct in its own name after him. This will, long

mislaid, or, it may be, put out of the gate, has now cast up, and Weatherby, being next lineal heir in the second degree, steps in. Our late laird, it's said, found it among some old family papers, and left it in trust until after his decease, as he couldn't bear to be harassed in his latter days with the litigation and law dust it's like to give rise to. That's the story that appears to be going now."

"Has this story been long current, Miss Henderland?"

"Not in it's present form," replied Jean. "There was always, since ever I can recollect, a kind of flittering tradition about this long deceased Lugs; how he was shamefully taken advantage of by his more powerful kinsman, and how it was prophesied he would be upsides with them yet, and an independent heir be raised to him of the lineage and name, even if it

should be as late as the fourth generation, and it's the fourth now. There was a rhyming verse about it: I'm sure I might mind it yet, for many a time I've heard it; when I first came here—I would be about twelve or thirteen then—it was a common bairn's rant. How's this it went again:

Now, fare ye weel——

No, that's not it.

You've done for me now, Whilliwaha—

that was the by-name for the elder and more powerful branch——

You've done for me now, Whilliwaha;

Look weel to the gear,

For sair will be its thraw

When Lugs casts up an heir.

That's the old tradition, Miss Morland; in ane's listening days, no doubt, all very weel and believable, when we used to sit and hear the auld folk of a dark windy night crackin ower the ingle of byganes

still aulder than themselves; but one hasn't the same confidence, come to responsible years. I doubt it's all nonsense, all a fancy, an island superstition, just to pass the time in a country where folk have so little else but their cracks to amuse them. And as to this modern edition of the story, and the will's having actually cast up, I doubt, by the same rule, it's all," &c. &c.

"To serve a purpose, perhaps," said Effie to herself, but not to Jean. It was late in the afternoon when they returned to the manse, and the minister's dinner was over, but Effie managed to get up something, along with a cup of tea, to help her wearied friend home, Jean having still a mile to walk to Peri-Point. Effie saw her a little bit of the way; and it was then Jean Henderland, with tears in her eyes, told her what the business of

her father's was that took her to South Cape. They had been informed, she said, that (in regard to Mr. Weatherby) Peri-Point was not the only favoured spot. At the other end of the island, on the Capelands Farm, there were similar attractions ; but she (Jean) was happy to say she could see no just grounds for the report. " It was just a little o' the small malice they might expect to circulate at Janet's good fortune."

CHAPTER IV.

A HUBBUB—THE PURSUIT OF A RUNAWAY.

THEY had two or three days of rough weather, and the winter house-bath was really no joke—raining, beating, and blowing incessantly, as if the islands had been whirling round; in the thick, boiling fog, not a house, nor a neighbour's face, not even a goose to be seen; nothing to be heard but the bellowing and rebellowing of the wind, and the regurgitating roar of the surrounding ocean.

Kith, who in such weather was always very restless and meditative, moved about the house elaborately doing nothing, muttering to herself, or addressing her mistress in whispers scarcely more audible: "Sic, sirs! we man tell the minister! it'll never fair till we tell him!"—meaning that the protracted bad weather was a punishment for keeping a secret from the minister. Kith's voice, at all times husky, was now so completely dried up, that her mistress feared she was going to lose it altogether; what with the weather and the haunting recollection of the mysterious interview which she had witnessed between the Eidolon of the late laird and his quondam agent, "the creepin worldly wreater creatur, Jan Beal." Effie judged it more prudent, however, to wait a little, and the matter was not communicated to Logan.

At last the weather showed signs of

abating, and they could see as far as the Residuary Isle, and the rock pigeons blowing about. Effie was darning the parson's stockings (about eleven in the forenoon), when, at once and unannounced, their landlord, Mr. Deerness, walked into the manse parlour with business on his brow. His manner was grave, his greeting brief; so much so, that Effie could not distinctly call to mind afterwards whether he shook hands with her or not.

“Have you seen or heard anything of Weatherby?” was his first question. Effie could not be mistaken in that—there was offence somewhere—the man was offended. But perhaps it will better suit our purpose just to state what the business was that had brought him thus unexpectedly to Hallow. In one word, then, Mr. Weatherby had absconded. It was now the sixth day since he had left his home in

Kirkwal, and the Master—so much Effie could gather—was now on his track, in furious pursuit of the fugitive. Moreover, she was given to understand, also, that it was all up with the Peri-Point romance ; he spoke of blotting out that poor little love affair in a way that made Effie's very heart ache. And, to say the truth, she got off but indifferently from her cross-examination. The unexpectedness of the visit, and the great uncertainty she still felt with regard to what part she ought to take in what appeared to be an impending family quarrel, gave an appearance of reluctance to her answers, and, once or twice, of something like positive equivocation. And this drew down on her a look which she felt would be but a sorry legacy to reflect on through the winter.

At that moment of sore discomfiture to Effie enters her friend Jean Hender-

land. Jean's walk from Peri-Point had been attended with some fatigue. She was, as she herself would have expressed it, sore tashed with the wind; nevertheless, at sight of the laird, her complexion mounted to a still more solemn red.

He certainly shook hands with Jean; but that seemed only to give an additional whet to his impatience.

"How do you do, Miss Henderland? Perhaps *you* will give me a plain answer to a plain question, though it is more than I can get from Miss Morland. Is it true that my brother Weatherby is engaged to your youngest sister?"

"They say—and I believe—at least I have heard sae," replied Jean Henderland; "but, if you please, sir, it's a subject I'm not free to speak of before folk."

"I will leave you," said Effie.

"No occasion, no occasion," said the

Master. "I have nothing more to say." But she had fled without waiting to hear the polite remonstrance.

Effie took refuge in the kitchen beside Kith, where, as the women say of themselves in such cases, she did not know whether to laugh or cry. Charlotte's queer inquiring face brought a little of both to her relief. They were not kept long in suspense: in about a quarter of an hour he left the house, and Effie returned to the parlour to her friend Jean.

And, in the first place, it was plain to Effie that Jean had won a battle of the sex; she had the wild, flushed look of victory, which no one can mistake.

"My faith, I've gien him'd!" was her first exclamation; "he'll not talk to me again about his entire disapproval, and a lost young man—lost young man, indeed!—and absurd connexions, and matches made

to be broken off—and must be broken off—and I must lend a hand, too, to help !”

“ Did he,” said Effie, with a sympathetic shiver—“ did he say all that ? And what did you say ?”

“ Say !” cried Jean, “ how can I tell now what I said when the passion was upon me ? But I gave him his brother’s character to begin with, and I gave him up his own foot, too, and that’s mair !”

“ I’ve no doubt you did, for he went away laughing, as I saw from the kitchen window.” Effie felt it absolutely necessary to say something to keep from laughing immoderately herself at this battle of Jean and the laird.

A huge frown was Jean’s only reply to this piece of information. Upon calm reflection, however, and when the victory had cooled down a little, Jean was constrained to own that there was both reason

and sense in some of his arguments against the match. He had evidently begun, it now appeared to Effie, by setting forth the unsuitability of his brother, but this putting up Jean's epigram to maintain the perfect suitability of her sister, they came at last to cross wooden swords, and the matter took the belligerent turn already described.

But the whole day was fruitful of incident and conjecture, and little bits of news coming in. Kith going to the mill for meal for the house, instead of meal comes back with the mill door locked! "The door was locked, and here was the laird and the minister and miller Bisset going from house to house making inquiry a'gate after poor Mr. Raby." Being questioned why she used the expression "poor" Mr. Raby, Charlotte said that the miller's mother had told her there was

word going it was judged (conjectured) he was a wee out o' his mind. "What do they say?" cries Jean Henderland. And then all Effie's endeavours to raise the drooping spirits of Jean were of no avail; not even the minister's adventure with Rob of the Bog, which Effie offered to tell, could prevail upon Jean to sit still any longer; she had become much of a wanderer of late, and away she went.

Night was falling, Jean Henderland gone, and Effie was just thinking of sitting down to her solitary cup of tea, when her brother came home, and Mr. Deerness with him. The latter appeared to be in much better humour now; Effie heard him say to Logan, as they were hanging up their hats in the lobby, "I am satisfied the whole report is much exaggerated, and very probably groundless." A friendly

nod begged Effie's pardon for former rudeness.

Having had nothing all day himself, he took a tea dinner along with the minister; and after that they had the statutory tumbler and eke, and the parson's adventure with Rob of the Bog.

Having brewed their tumblers and drawn together over the fire, Logan fronting the bright blaze in the middle seat, and the other two *vis-à-vis*, he took up the story of his adventure with Rob in the following terms.

"It will probably surprise you, Mr. Deerness," said Logan, "to be told that the other night I had as narrow an escape from petty assassination as a man could wish to have. The author of the outrage I have no legal proof of as yet, but I have the very strongest grounds for suspecting

a boor (for I can hardly call him tenant), who occupies a solitary hut on the large peat morass known as the Moss of Scowp : he lives with an old woman, his mother. You know him, of course ?”

The Master just glanced across the way to see in what manner the subject was to be treated ; now, there was a world of suppressed laughter dancing in Effie’s eyes.

“ Intimately,” said he ; “ I know Rob well—Rob of the Bog they call him. Rob must have been mad with jealousy. He is, you must know, my dear parson, a little in your own line, save the license ; for having no proper calling or inclination to work, he’s a sort of a hedge preacher, and the idlest dog in the whole island. But I interrupt. Go on, sir.”

“ So, I had a hint to that effect,” continued the parson ; “ I had, in fact, for some

time past been desirous of obtaining a sight of this mad fanatic, but hitherto he had contrived to avoid me. A few days ago, however, having a call or two to make in that direction, I formed the resolution of visiting him at his own abode. Whether he was really from home as the old woman said, or, seeing me coming, had slipped out of the road, is immaterial to the story; I had to return, as the phrase is, from a bootless errand. It was on the borders of twilight, and already almost dark, when, just as I entered on the gloomiest part of the morass, where it was formerly dug for peats, and is full of hollows and pitfalls, a missile of some description, thrown with great violence, carried off my hat! I instantly turned round, but could see no one, and it was hopeless in such ground to attempt any search. Well, scarcely had I

recovered my hat, when another and another similar missile whistled past my ear !”

At this point the laugh became general, the parson himself joining, though it was no laughing matter.

“ I am well aware,” said he, “ that everything has of course its ludicrous side ; but, sister Effie, there was no occasion to be so very copious before the time : were I to cut the story short here, it would rather puzzle Mr. Deerness to guess what you were laughing at so. But I will tell him. Those missiles, sir, which on my revisiting the ground by daylight appeared to consist in small round turnips, were evidently mere decoys laid for the purpose of concealing the more malignant character of the attempt, laughable as I now admit it to be over a tumbler.”

Here again the laugh was renewed.

“Turnips, or decoys, my dear parson, I must congratulate you on the narrow escape you have made. But if you really saw turnips on the ground when you went back next day, that brings it at once home to the prowling villain Rob; the “neep” is an old favourite of his, and never comes amiss to him, whether for eating raw or for pelting any one he has an ill will at. And let me tell you, our small hard turnips are no joke—they are not like your southern bulbs—a good rap on the head from one of them might have hanged Rob!”

He concluded by saying that if the fellow was growing so dangerous, he must banish him the island.

So they talked and laughed the night away, and Effie was going to Kirkwal in

the morning. They even got her to sing. She had one or two old Jacobite songs, which she sang very sweetly "to please the laird," who promised to give her a piano.



CHAPTER V.

THE SAIL TO KIRKWAL—A GLIMPSE OF THE FUGITIVE.

WE need not dwell upon the parson's good advices to Effie for the regulation of her manners and behaviour in the Kirkwal world of fashion. "Above all," said he, "give a wide berth to yon Miss Rachel Shore: that is an amazon who wields a mighty spear, or I am much mistaken!"

Effie was, of course, at her window by peep of day. The morning rose gorgeous in clouds: the view from her bedroom of

the Frith and the Residuary Isle, and the Mool of Venturefair, with the sun rising between, was one unfathomable flood of purple and gold : the mists were yet sleeping in the lake, but above the small sheet of water, on the Brodds of Kirk, Logan was walking at his morning orisons ; and the geese before the door stretched their long, writhing necks and yellow bills, raising a grateful clamour just under Effie's window.

Old Dr. Brechin, who was going part of the way with them, kept them waiting till nearly two o'clock. But the doctor was famous company and worth waiting for. His last visit dribbled out, he came at last, and they set sail with a steady November breeze blowing off the land. There was little or no swell—the sea was as smooth and as black as some vast monumental floor, only varying in hue as the gusts

brooming over it were plied with greater or less rapidity.

“I’m saying, Melethor,” quoth the doctor, “have you any of that Bell Rennie left yet on board? Don’t you think a bit sma’ collation, just here as we sit, could hardly come amiss? What does the young lady say? Don’t you think, my dear, it would have a pretty effect, and mak just a pictur’ of us in the absence of sunshine this blae afternoon?”

Effie nodded; so Captain Kith was summoned aft, and got his orders to see what he could do to furnish forth their quarter-deck table. “Plenty o’ a’ thing, plenty o’ a’ thing,” said the captain, who at sea was in his way a sort of marine Caleb Balderstone. At present his plenty of everything was epitomised in bread-and-butter, a pot of jam, and a reindeer’s tongue; something the captain muttered about a pie,

“but the mools had got at it in the late boustrous weather.”

“Never mind the pie, *mon capitaine*,” said the old medicus; “with a glass of the Bell Rennie, we’ll fend, we’ll fend.”

“I keep the key of that locker myself,” said the Master; “the captain makes a very good sea butler, but I never could get him to learn to decant a bottle of port.”

The collation was spread, and the company were set.

“How many stories now, my dear,” says the doctor, jocularly, to Effie, “do you think ’s in that bottle of Bell Rennie?” Next to a glass of good wine the old gentleman loved a good story, and he had a great collection of his own which he was very fond of telling. There was one in particular Effie could not help laughing at. “I forget, *Melethor*,” said the doctor; “did

I ever tell you the narrow escape I had from that absurd Edinburgh lawyer that they called Councillor Bobadil, who was cruising up here in the year '32 ; I forget his real name at present, but his friends had nicknamed him Bobadil, and a very proper appellation it was for the fellow. But of course you must have heard—I must have told you *that* one. However, here's our young friend here never heard it, and it will be a treat to her, especially if what they say of young ladies in general be true, that the mischances and misadventures and *coups* of us old bachelors are just marrow to their bones. Isn't that the case, my dear ?”

“ Not generally, doctor,” replied Effie, laughing ; “ only occasionally — only to those who prefer a single life, like yourselves.”

“ Vera weel answered indeed,” said the

doctor; "we've heard worse, Melethor—the bairn has a wit of its ain. But to proceed with my story. You see that dangerous reef of rocks out by there, my dear, with the three black jagged points just above the water; they are called the Skerries of Scartness, from the great flocks of cormorants or scarts that haunt them at low water. Ye have your eye upon them, have ye? Now, how would you like to sit there your leave-a-lane all night in your frock as I did one night in my bedgown—with absolutely nothing on my shouthers but an auld flannel bedgown?"

"Come, I say, Brechin," interposed the laird, "that's a new circumstance—the toggery. I never heard that before."

"Did you never?" said the doctor, delighted at having hit on something new for him also. "It's an absolute truth, however. I had just time to pull on my

breeks, slip on a pair of shoes, and there was no time for more ; besides, it was the month of June, and the flannel gown, I thought, would do well enough. It was the middle, then, Miss Morland, of a fine summer night, between twelve and one o'clock, I was knocked up to come immediately to the laird of Dropegrog, who, the letter said, was at his last gasp. A very ancient gentleman, my dear, whose island Mr. Deerness will point out to you as you pass it. The men who brought the letter were just as drunk as such an express might be expected, and I had only a few days before parted with my own thief of a boy. So here was a nice mess ; not a soul to help me to launch the pinnace, and my most valuable patient at his last gasp ! You see, young lady, it is no joke being a doctor in Orkney. However, as I said before, it was a summer night, the weather

looked settled, the wind was fair, a fine light tripping breeze, and I thought I might venture it alone in the yawl. There was no time to put off thinking; down I ran, equipped as I have told you, pushed out the yawl, up sail and away, as proud of my feat, now that I was fairly into it, as if I had been Venus herself in her first curriculum dancing over the waves: not amiss for an old bachelor, wasn't it, my dear?

“But the misery was, I had had very little sleep for three nights running, and, do what I would, I could not keep myself from napping. The first one, let me tell you both, gave me a dreadful start when I woke and looked round about me on my watery bed. I—however, I got used to it; and, as I could steer as well asleep as awake, I thought I might safely indulge a little. The only oversight I committed

in my sleep was forgetting that these same Skerries of Scartness that you still see out yonder, lay right in the track that I was going ; which shows you, Miss Morland, what wonderful steerers we are here in Orkney. Bump I went right on the top of them, to pieces flew the yawl out below me, and there was I left sitting in my flannel gown till morning.

“Fancy the horror of my situation, Miss Morland, when even yet out on my cauld perch I could not entirely drive away the syren sleep, but was in momentarily apprehension and danger of tumbling off and being drowned ! Another horror was, I could not remember the state of the tide. In high spring tides the Skerries are entirely covered over. It pleased Heaven, however, to spare me this last and most awful form of death. Towards morning it was blowing fresh, and

there was scant sitting-room enough, with the surf lashing about my legs, when I saw a boat making towards me—a joyful sight, I can tell you both. I clapped my hands and shouted, but the raw morning air and fright together, had taken away my voice—more by token, Miss Morland, I was a sweet singer before that, and sang the best Jacobite song in the country, as the laird here can tell you.


“The story, my dear, of this very singular adventure of mine is nearly done: would it not have been very hard, after making such a narrow escape of being drowned, if, after all, I had been shot! The boat, you must know, turned out to be Councillor Bobadil’s, on his cruise; and the absurd fellow, instead of a spy-glass, the only weapon he was fit to be trusted with, happened to have a gun in his hand. Would man believe it, he

actually took me for a scart, and was for having a shot at me! the clapping of my hands, he said, was plainly the bird clapping its wings; but luckily the remonstrances of his terrified crew, who saw that I was a strange and rather large bird of the kind, prevented him from committing his fatal mistake, for fatal I am convinced it would have been had the wretch fired; though he had hitherto missed everything, it is just as certain as any undemonstrated proposition his cockney luck would not have let him miss me. Indeed, Mr. Bobadil told me as much himself. When I was taken on board his yacht, and the whole thing thought a very good joke, he said that of course he was very glad to have been the means of rescuing me, but still it was a cursed disappointment that I was not the bird he took me for—one of the larger kind, and not

the common scart, which no mortal man could hit in a surf: I was something like a reasonable mark, and he was certain to have bagged me! I am told the fellow is still roving about during the summer months, yachting, shooting, and fishing; but if he quits the world without doing himself or some other body a mischief, it will be another addition to the wonders of Providence."

They landed the doctor at Windywalls, the chief port in the Residuary Isle. Effie was sorry at parting with him, and the old medicus, who seemed to have taken a no less paternal fancy to her, said she must come over to see him when she returned to Hallow.

They now stood more out to sea; the shores of Corbysholm became dim and indistinct in the twilight of a November afternoon; and other islands, equally sha-



dowy, began to rise all around. Effie had great difficulty in distinguishing, between their overlapping plications or folds, one from another; sometimes, what she took for two islands was only one, and, *vice versâ*, what she took for a large one in its seeming uniformity of outline, was three; it was odd, she remarked to the Master, but everything now seemed much newer to her than on the first passage out. Even her old friends, the tremendous red cliffs of Blawart, or Redcraigs, off which they were all so nearly going down, hardly looked the same.

“I fancy, Effie,” said the Master, with a keen but quite pleasant look, “it just comes to this, that we have *all* improved on better acquaintance.”

He evidently referred to himself. His manner was peculiar—it intimated the highest degree of favour and friendship

for Effie, without the slightest apparent alloy—it neither flattered her vanity, nor caused her to shrink.

“Do you know where you are now, Effie?” said he.

“I think I do. It was here, was it not, sir, where we were stopped all night in Hoolie’s shower?”

He laughed, and said, “The very spot.”

Running through the narrow strait here, the bleat of the sheep indicated a change of weather; seeking their scanty pasturage among the rocks, they were so near as to stare Effie in the face; and the surrounding hills had that green and swelling appearance which in these latitudes is a sure sign of rain. Detached clouds, wearied-looking and fagged, called by the boatmen rain-bags, were sifting all about; generally they rolled to the craggy tops of the hills before breaking, but some-

times they burst midway, discharging their contents in short, sharp, pelting showers. One fell plump on the *Brenda*, and Effie looked up from it as fresh as a rose. Then he gave her his arm and walked her up and down ; he did not talk very much, but his remarks were useful glimpses of the kind of society she was going to mix with. And then there was a cry of " Sail ahead ! "

" Captain Kith, what sail is that coming down the Roost of Scapaway ? "

The captain bent his nautical eye on the stranger, and having done so, came aft to report.

" I could not say to mak her out by head-mark, but she's a spanking craft, whatever. I was thinking as she might be the new man's from the Faroes that's bought Brok. "

" Ludowick Shurlson ! I believe it is

the uncouth puppy. Here, Kith, take the helm from Trinculo" (an urchin who was a sort of sea-page), "and just lay her off a bit. I want to have a look of our new friend."

Our new friend carried a merry crew, to judge by their singing. Suddenly the chorus ceased; and Effie, looking for explanation, observed sparks of ire in the Master's eye.

"Keep her up, Kith," he said, turning sudden and sharp on the captain; "d—n it, don't you see what they're after? They want to take the weather-side of us!"

"I'm dooting, sir," replied the captain, "we'll deest een have to let them tak it; I've gien her rather much o' the helm to pull up now."

"Then, why the—why"—checking him-

self before Effie—"did you give her so much? Up with her as close as she'll hug! I'll run them down rather than let them take the wind of us!"

Effie knew nothing of the burning jealous rivalry between men of yachts, but her brother's disquisitions had taught her something of the pride and naughtiness of the human heart, and, even to her inexperienced eye, it appeared abundantly evident that in attempting to get the wind of each other, both parties were determined to abide by the alternative of a crash. On they came stem to stem with fearful velocity, the *Brenda* having rather the best of it, but still it was doubtful whether they would have room to clear on the side of honour; at that moment, a glimpse of Effie's face decided the matter. The Master shouted to Captain Kith, "Lay her

off, let them take it !” And as the two vessels shot past each other, he called to the victors, “Thank your luck rather than your sailing, my lads; had I not had a lady on board, you would not have got off so easily !”

“No, we thank our courage !” was replied, in a strange northern accent, by the commander of the rival yacht; to which again ours as quickly rejoined,

“So you may thank your courage—it’s a little Dutch !”

At this there was a defiant roar of laughter and a waving of glasses, which was soon lost in distance, as the vessels flew from each other in the freshening breeze.

They got into Kirkwal at six, just as the hour was striking from St. Magnus. As they walked up the pier, Mr. Deerness re-

marked, in something of a dry tone, "I thought I saw Weatherby among these yachting sparks; did you?"

Effie thought one of them "was like Mr. Weatherby."

The novelty of her situation, the lights of Kirkwal shooting up in the dark, the comforts of town and the brilliant company she expected in a few minutes to be introduced to, prevented Effie from confiding to him then the one sole matter upon her mind that, like an uncertain spot, dimmed her enjoyment of life in the north.

CHAPTER VI.

EFFIE MAKES HER DÉBUT IN THE FASHIONABLE SOCIETY OF TOWN UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES CALCULATED TO GIVE RISE TO DISSATISFACTION, AND PERHAPS TO SOME SMALL SCANTLING OF JEALOUSY.

THERE are a few fine stately old town-houses in the upper part of the town. Stopping at one of these, and pulling the door bell, Mr. Deerness welcomed Effie to Belyewane.

A tall, lady-like person met them in the lobby. This was Miss Betsy Bruce, the housekeeper, a great favourite with the whole family.

“All well, Betsy?” inquired the Master.

“Is it you, sir? They are all well, I am happy to say. Mr. Jerrold was complaining a little, but he is better. Mr. William and he are dining at Mr. Cuthbert Belfeur’s, and Grouse is with them. Have you” (this was spoken *sotto voce* in a sort of half aside)—“have you heard anything, sir, of Mr. Raby?”

“Yes. He has been at Brok. Has he not come? he was to be home this evening.”

“Oh! that’s satisfactory,” said Bruce. “He has not come yet; but it’s very thoughtless of Mr. Raby not to leave word where he is going. Your mamma and sister are at Mrs. Shore’s. Miss Rachel came over and would take no denial; and I was to say that you are expected over if you came.”

In answer to all this the Master pre-

found a request that Bruce would get them a cup of tea. The cup of tea was rather a civil affair; he was bustling and showing almost to positive indignation; however, it did not last very long—the housekeeper was again summoned and desired to show Miss Morland her room. "There's no party where we are going," he said, "so you need not be particular about dressing."

But up-stairs the opinion went that important matter the toilet was rather different. "We must have you dress a wee bit for all that, Miss Morland," said the Bruce. "They are grand people the Shores. Seldom a night but they have somebody with them, and you will find Mrs. Shore a gay, kindly old lady, and great collector of young people, who likes to have everything nice about her."

Now there was one dress Effie had

never yet ventured to wear in the north—it was a dress that became her, and Bruce's description of grand, old, kindly Mrs. Shore determined her to go the length of this her most sacred and precious piece of finery, being a present from an old wealthy merchant and friend of their late father's. So what with the gown, gorgeous in its posthumous trimmings, Effie's luxuriant hair, the vanity and the little bit more of colour in the cheek, when she swept down stairs and apologised for keeping him waiting, the Master, who, still in a staring reverie, stood rubbing his back at the mantelpiece, absolutely started, and took her by both hands. "Why, Effie," said he, "you are magnificent! beautiful!"

He was a high fellow, this Laird Melethor, but he had humour, and liked to astonish the natives by showing off with a

fine girl that none of them knew and would be sure to set them a buzzing—"Who is she? anybody? nobody?" So he walked into the drawing-room at Mount Pleasant with Effie upon his arm, looking as proud of her as if she had been the beautiful brunette Countess of G——, whom she was said to resemble. There was a large company—too large for Effie to distinguish at the moment between the warm, gushing welcome of her friend Harriet and the more courtly congratulations of Mrs. Deerness.

The chief attraction (always excepting our countess) was a young lady presiding at the piano. This was the celebrated Miss Rachel, the daughter of the house, and, according to common report, the intended of Melethor Deerness. But I must own I was as much disappointed as Effie was the first time I saw this far-

famed beauty. The young lady was tall and highly coloured, and had dark, brilliant eyes, but they were not good; stony, egotistical orbs, glittering with vanity and every wish gratified and ungratified that wealth can engender; a bad mouth, upper lipped, loquacious, insolent (in parson Logan's description this feature reads, "stuffed full of arguments for having everything her own way"), and that feature which in woman should either be Grecian or French, or at least English, presented difficulties such that even juvenile admirers, instinctively rubbing their own, were fain to pass over with a sort of reverential dissatisfaction.

No. The story of Miss Rachel's beauty was all an invention of that hypocritical villain, man. In her talents, therefore, we must look for the secret of her popularity, because, undoubtedly, Shore was the idol

of her circle. They would have it that she sang like Pasta.

"Do, Miss Rachel," cried a lady parasite—poor Mrs. William Macabodo—"do sing us that sweet little thing of Longfellow's."

"Do!" echoed Macbriar, of the Bank, who was staring with all his eyes at Effie.

"Oh!" said Miss Rachel, "you must be tired of singing;" then, sarcastically to the banker, "Anything for a change, Mr. Macbriar."

Macbriar coughed and bowed.

And then, of course, Miss Rachel sang. It was only those—as James Rollockson, the writer to the signet, a witty but somewhat whimsical friend of the family, remarked—only those who were not used to their Pasta, or had never heard the original, who suffered.

So that altogether Effie's appearance

occasioned some talk. From the very first night observant people ~~shugged~~ their shoulders, and old maids licked their lips, at the prospect of one who would ere long be likely to shake the supremacy of Shore. Macbriar, sneering, sarcastic scoundrel, who commonly went by the name of Mephisto, said, "Yes, they would make a good fight;" and in general it was remarked that the imperious favourite's singing was that night more than usually Pastaish and dissonant. But more especially by the greener youths was the new star hailed, these poor little beggars having long groaned under the hypocritical state of thralldom to which they were reduced by Miss Rachel's ruthless exaction of attentions.

The personal introduction is above our pen in a first hasty sketch ; enough to say that Miss Rachel's reception of Effie was

most unctuously gracious, and gave unqualified satisfaction to the drawing-room Mephistopheles.

Among other notables whom Effie saw that night at Mrs. Shore's was a couple who have a slight, but rather curious, connexion with the story. This was a Mr. and Mrs. Macabodo: the gentleman appeared to be professor of commerce in some university or other—a fine, fat, florid fellow of most excellent discourse, and, indeed, altogether inimitable utterance. But more of Mr. Macabodo in another chapter.

Being in mourning for the old man, the Belyewane family kept, of course, early hours. Ten o'clock. At ten o'clock the Mount Pleasant salon, with its bland old lady and all her company, was, "like a faded pageant," exchanged for the silence

of the domestic drawing-room of Belyewane.

Grouse, who would not go to bed till he saw Effie, was lying asleep on the hearth-rug. They sprinkled a little water in his face, and he started up in a fury, rubbing his eyes to give battle, but seeing Effie, he said his "How are you?" like a man. They all laughed, Mrs. Deerness a little too—the mother's heart was full; she retired and left them to their uninterrupted chat. "Good night, children, good night, girls; don't let these boys sit up too late."

In so far as example went the maternal injunction was strictly attended to. Miss Deerness was still at that happy age when sleep comes imperatively at a certain hour as it does to children; Effie and Harriet were off to the land of nod, the Master,

too, had lighted his candle and retired at the same time ; but after all the others were gone, the three dined lads were still sitting up in limbo over the drawing-room fire. John Barleycorn was not to be done. They would not go to bed. "Nothing so low," said little Grouse, who was not at all particular in his choice of a phrase when he wished to express himself facetiously. In short, having stirred their cups with a sprig of the herb wisdom which grows in the garden at Mr. Cuthbert's, the three were now deep in gossip on their most serious and private affairs.

"Ken ye, lads, if Raby's cast up yet?" inquired the Jollyboat.

"Yes, he's cast up," replied Grouse, "not above a quarter of an hour before you—as D K," said Grouse, "as Davie's sow. I was lying on the rug, and pre-

tended to be sleeping, and not to see him : so he looked at me with a hoo-hoo of a laugh and stachered away up-stairs till 's bed."

" Hang me if I can understand Raby ; he's not like any of 's," said the Jollyboat, in a regretful tone.

" He is not," responded William Institute.

Next they talked of the divided state of the Church, and which side it would become them to take. The Belfeurs, the Goldimunds, the Binns courts, almost all their acquaintances, were now decidedly declared firm ; they could give a good guess at Melethor's mind on the subject, and perhaps they might do worse than stick to the old shop. No doubt mamma was very strong on the other side, but how long would that continue ? You heard

what both Belfeur and Mr. Gilchrist said :
'It is not in Mrs. D.'s nature long to agree with any form of dissent.' "

"And by my faith, lads," says the Jolly-boat, sagaciously, "that same's true. If mamma thought she was to be called a *Dissenter*, she would cut the body to-morrow."

Here a light shone at their backs. They looked round and saw their mother still dressed as she had come from Mrs. Shore's, carrying a bedroom candle, and having every appearance of walking in her sleep. She pretended to have come seeking a book she was reading, but she was close upon them before she observed the group, and when she did the candle distinctly waved in her hand. The book found, she took a chair and began asking who were all at Mr. Cuthbert's. William Institute ran over a list of the company. Says the Jollyboat,

"I'll bet you half a dozen counters to one, mamma, that Cuthbert's dinner has nothing to do with it; you are annoyed; something has occurred to annoy you at Mrs. Shore's."

Upon which, as if she would willingly give the matter a jocular turn, the Lady of Hallow owned that "her big sonsy son" was right.

"Well," she said, "I *am* annoyed, boys, and that's the truth; I am annoyed at your brother Melethor. Effie Morland is a very good, unassuming girl, and a great favourite with you all, but it certainly was ill-judged his introducing her at Mrs. Shore's in so public and conspicuous a manner. Melethor ought to be more careful how he gives occasion to people's tittle-tattle."

"Psh! what about it?" said quiet, sensible William Institute; but this was too quiet for the Jollyboat, who, with a grunt-

ing laugh, added, "By my sowl, mamma, you had best take care what you say to people. The parson's sister may be your gude-däuter yet!" (your daughter-in-law yet).

Mothers like no such jesting. Taking up her candle, which she held somewhat averted, "black she stood as night." She did not say much, owing to the lateness of the hour, but the little she did say finished both joke and joker: "William," addressing his elder brother, "see that great pig to his bed: he has taken far too much wine."

CHAPTER VII.

PROFESSOR MACABODO, FINDING HIS COMMERCIAL TALENTS NOT APPRECIATED BY THE GENTRY OF THULE, TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO THE DISCOVERY OF HIDDEN TREASURES—HE BECOMES THEREBY INSTRUMENTAL TO THE SETTING UP OF THE BLETHERENTLET TITLE — HIS INGENIOUS ATTEMPTS TO APPLY THE LAW OF SALVAGE FOR BEHOOF OF THE FINDER.

OUR host, to use a favourite phrase of the parson's, asked me, as I was one of the walking party, to go shares in a "talk" with the Professor. I had had occasion to know something of Macabodo, when he was manager of the —— Company; my

actual knowledge of the gentleman, however, did not warrant my going beyond giving Mr. Deerness a jocular hint to take care, but I soon saw that Melethor himself was too seriously dipped in the ingenious Professor's schemes for the commercial revival of the archipelago, to relish any joking on such a subject, or to permit hypothetical aspersions being cast at the great apostle of development, and the author of the Development Treatise. "You need not be in the road," said he, "but I should like you to be at hand." This referred to some statistical information, in which it was thought I might be an aid to, and occasionally a check upon, the Professor. I promised the hovering degree of attendance required.

The morning was fine, and we were all in great glee. Mr. Weatherby, to whom I had the pleasure of being introduced for

the first time, was candour itself on the subject of his late disappearance; he gave a full account of his travels, of where he had been, and all he had seen, and told some humorous anecdotes of the new laird of Brok, with whom he had "finished up."

"Where to go?" The question was in full debate, when,

"Behold, Aurora comes!" cried the Grouse, who sometimes tried his hand at a joke on Miss Rachel. Grouse wanted to take Effie to see the Pict's house first; but Miss Rachel looked around, and perceiving a certain blank in the company, began to talk against time.

Melethor found the Professor and his lady just finishing breakfast. The compliments of the morning over,

"Now, sir, I am yours," said the Professor, bustling on his great-coat. "The only question is" (bowing gallantly to his

better half), "what are you to make of yourself, my dear?"

"Oh," replied the lively Englishwoman (she was still pretty, and had been a fortune in her youth), "as your Scotch saw says, 'I'll fend, I'll fend.' My dear William, mind your own business, and give yourself no concern about me."

"We are merely going for a walk, won't you come with us, Mrs. Macabodo?" It struck Melethor that she looked to the good-man for permission, which, by just a scarce perceptible as it were needle's point glance of the Professor's eye, was refused.

"Thanks, Mr. Deerness," she said, "not this morning."

So Melethor returned with "our distinguished friend," as the prejudiced were disposed to phrase the connexion. He was a florid, full, punchy figure of a man, the

Professor, and always wore his great-coat, like his under surtout, tight and smartly cut.

Like most accomplished men of talent, Macabodo was an adept in all questions of amusement as well as of business. He said at once, "Good morning, young ladies and gentlemen; I don't know a prettier walk than to Meldrum's moor; why not go and see my diggings?"

"Where they're howkin for mair Pict's houses," said Grouse, "and the goold and buried treasures. Come along, Effie; give us your hand."

So the matter was settled, and the party leaving town, we set out on our walk by a footpath winding over the heather; the Professor, the author, and our host a little in the rear. The Professor set out by expatiating on the agreeable evening at Mrs.

Shore's. "A remarkably pleasant, hospitable, agreeable old lady as ever I met," said he.

"Very much so," said M. "Shore left her very wealthy."

"And the daughter," added the Professor, "struck me as positively distinguished."

A dry "Very" from Melethor. He began to suspect that Macabodo, with all his jolly appearance, was soured and sarcastic.

William Macabodo, by a numerous circle of acquaintances, after he began to decline in the world, commonly styled the Professor, was one of your too vivacious votaries of fortune, who, from the very outset, mistake their goddess altogether. Not even a miracle could induce in them a belief that honesty is absolutely the very best policy. Without being absolute rogues—they are too fine gentlemen for that—they

belong to the race, for ever deviating from the straight line to snatch those side advantages that look so tempting in their sanguine eyes and are as sapping in the long run to a solid income as speculation itself. His wife's fortune had long been spent; the specious scheme, the grand investment, dwindled down to any shift for a bare living—even that no longer to be made at home; and the Professor's home was wide—as in the description of another place, his reputation had caused it open-mouthed to enlarge itself; chance, or I know not what *ignis-fatuus*, brought Macabodo to Orkney.

But the old story; no sooner has he set foot on the new ground, than out comes the flaming prospectus: “Restoration of their fisheries. Restoration of the kelp trade. Establishment of soap manufactories of their own. Of salt-works. A

grand junction whaling company—general life assurance and mutual loan company—concentration of capital among themselves—Bank of Orkney—and Kirkwal the emporium of the north.”

And how did the Professor propose to accomplish all this? By steam, as the Pasha in Eothen says,—all by steam.

“I protest, Mr. Deerness,” exclaimed the envoy of Mammon, “your internal stagnation is a disgrace to the gentlemen of Orkney! Under the present system your tenantry are mere serfs—the land is just adequate to yield them a bare subsistence; free them, give them steam communication, the means of commercial interchange, raise them above merely grubbing out of the soil as much as will keep body and rags together, and you will see,” &c. &c.

“I suspect there is more in that argu-

ment than you are aware of," said Melethor.

Mr. Macabodo was delighted to hear him say so. There could not be a better proof, &c. &c. "Would to Heaven, my dear sir," exclaimed he, "that the others were all of your mind, or had the same intelligence to see their way to an ultimate result so desirable. But when I reflect on their inveterate prejudices, I must own that I cannot altogether repress a feeling of despondency."

This candid admission referred to some rebuffs Macabodo had already met with in the outset. His patron's most intimate friend, the laird of Dropogrog, in particular, was furiously opposed: the mere mention of Macabodo's name as a person likely to succeed and do some good to the country, was enough at any time to drive

the ancient hereditary incubus frantic. "Twenty years had the country been at peace—twenty years since they had suffered from the last d—d pretender to the same thing!"

But this morning Mac did not appear to be in the vein, *i.e.* for the public good. This morning we were surprised to find the Professor's conversation running into quite irrelevant topics; so much so, that M., eyeing him askance, was in some doubt whether he might not have laced his last cup of tea a little too stiffly; but yet there was a purpose in the full, pale, and somewhat bilious eye irreconcilable with this notion, and he concluded by suspecting that Macabodo wanted to borrow money of him. As this suspicion crossed his mind, our host drew his breath with that half audible, interjectional whistle, which few men can resist in the circumstances sup-

posed. Mr. Macabodo heard it, and said: "I see—I perceive, Mr. Deerness, that you are surprised at my manner. The fact is, I had a motive for asking you to come here this morning. I believe, sir, I am in possession of a secret of the utmost consequence to yourself. Strange, sir, to relate, and not less strange than true, I yesterday found in an old previous excavation, not far from the present, a title, or disposition, by your late father, in favour of your brother, Mr. Weatherby, to what appears to be a considerable portion of the Hallow estate."

There was a pause—the Professor's face rather red, as though he felt himself in for it. He was mustering up something apologetical, when the other cut him short.

"This is out of your line altogether, Mr. Macabodo. Let me see this paper you say you found."

"Why, my dear sir," cried the Professor, "you surely cannot think I would carry a document of that importance about with me!"

"This is no accidental meeting; what the devil in ——, sir, do you mean by a cock-and-bull excuse of that kind? If you have not the paper with you, you ought to have had it!" Warm language to a man of the Professor's jolly, gentlemanly appearance and years—Macabodo might be fifty; but his temper was to the last degree irritated by the threatened mutilation of his property. When he spoke again it was in a maundering sort of tone, as if ashamed of his violence. "Found, you say, in the Pict's house? Admitting my father to have committed this piece of folly, what, in the name of all the Trollds, could have induced him to deposit a paper of that kind in such a place?"

“There was, undoubtedly,” Macabodo observed, “a mystery there. But the Trollds were anciently deities of these islands, were they not? Might not the old gentleman, your father, have some superstitious motive for depositing this particular nest-egg in such a place?”

“Call it simply paper, Mr. Macabodo. I beg you to observe that I am in no mood to stand embellishment.”

“Very well; paper be it,” said the Professor. “I was about to suggest, that, having executed a disposition likely to occasion surprise, and perhaps some little shock, in the family, is it not just possible that through some superstitious remnant of the old belief—hesitating to put this division of the property in force during his lifetime—your father might have selected such a place of deposition in the belief that he thereby referred the case to those

ancient arbiters of your insular destinies, the Trollds?"

Little as he was in the laughing mood, Mr. Deerness could not help smiling at an hypothesis so ingeniously characteristic. "No, no!" he said. "You did not know my father, Mr. Macabodo, or you never would have taken that fancy. Nothing could be more unlike him than the course indicated in your ingenious conjecture."

And for a few minutes the conversation was allowed to drop. Coming in sight of Meldrum's moor, the scene of his researches, it was again resumed by the Professor. He paused, and with a peculiarly thoughtful air, as if a new view of the subject had just occurred to him, said:

"*Stop* a little—are you not, my dear sir, overlooking a most material point?"

There were no witnesses to the finding of this paper : I was alone when I found it."

To tell the truth, I could hardly bear (standing aloof) to look at the agony depicted in the man's pale, full eye ; but the other's inattention allowed the hint to escape, and it elicited only the cold and absent reply, "Of no moment : it does not affect the title itself, supposing a valid title to exist."

"Pardon me," continued Macabodo, "I rather think it does, the validity of the title being the main point at issue. If I place this paper in your hands, you become sole judge and disposer of it. It rests with you to say, 'Is this a genuine deed by my late father? *or*, is it not rather, all things considered'—the out-of-the-way place where it was found," said the Professor—"an invention of those malicious

and capricious beings formerly deities in these islands, but who, since the introduction of Christianity, have been reduced to that small herd of petty demons supposed to haunt their old burrows, and still existing in the belief of the country people, to whom they are better known by the name of Trollds ? ” ”

Mr. Deerness stared : he was unwilling to think the man could be in actual earnest—unwilling to subject the matter to a too literal construction, which would have argued a depth of depravity, or of poverty, that was really hardly credible : he might suspect, but he could not actually know, that Mr. Macabodo was so much in want of a fifty-pound note. His answer was dry but frank, and not without a friendly loophole to the Professor, if he chose to avail himself of it. “ There is no doubt,”

he said, "a good deal of ignorance in Orkney, Mr. Macabodo. We lairds ourselves are often no brighter than we should be, and bonded incomes do unquestionably darken the lairdly understanding; but I hope it is not a part of your development scheme to show us how to take a lighted candle to troublesome private papers, for I am afraid, sir, it can't be done in the name of old Trolld; it's all up with that!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" loud laughed the Professor.

Macabodo was, of course, a master in the nice art of backing out. The blood, indeed, which guards that honest citadel, man's heart, rushed rather violently upward: he blushed, but 'twas a sign of grace. "Could you suppose, my dear sir, for a moment, that such a"—&c. &c.

And therewithal silence settled down on the Professor and his patron ; and for a time nothing was to be heard save the small crisp sound arising from the stimulating sunshine in the heather, and the moorcock crowing to their scattered coveys along the heath.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROLLOCKSON IN TOWN — MISS RACHEL HAS A CONFIDENTIAL
WALK WITH HER BROTHER, MR. FRED.

RETURNING from our walking excursion, the first news we heard was from little Grouse, who, being first in, as he had been first to start, came to meet us, singing out, "Rollockson's come! Rollockson's in town!" And this was followed up by the gentleman in person. I had met Rollockson before. He was second partner in the great W. S. firm of Brandibrand, Rollockson, and Baliol. A

native of Orkney, and himself a proprietor, he was family lawyer to most of the large estates in the north, and generally paid them a visit once a year.

“My dear James,” said his most particular and intimate friend, Melethor, “I never was more delighted to see you. But how come you so late? You are more than a month past your time.”

“The fact is, I couldn’t conveniently get sooner,” said Mr. Rollockson. “Old Brandibrand has been on the ball again, and when that’s the case, I can’t get my post left—hem—you understand—between Baliol and him ; there’s no getting Baliol to keep his aristocratic temper, and when the drunken old devil’s in that state”—Mr. Rollockson shrugged his shoulders—“you may fancy whether the scenes that take place are becoming the firm ! Were it not that I had got used to them, and

that old B. originally made the business, it would hardly be possible for us to hold together. But how are things moving here?"

"Not very well, I am sorry to say." And he narrated his adventure with the Professor.

Rollockson heard him with a grave, almost dismayed look, for he was a man of keen sensibility. "I should hope," he said, "the thing may turn out to be a hoax. At all events, it is impossible to give any opinion until I see the paper, and the sooner we get it out of that fellow Macabodo's hands, the better."

In the evening, they called on Mr. Macabodo, at his hotel. The Professor was, of course, delighted to see them, but the document was no longer in his possession. "Fact, gentlemen," said the Professor; "it has taken wing again—back,

if I am not much mistaken, to its parent nest. Did they know a Mr. John, or Jan Beal, a writer in town, formerly agent to the late Mr. Deerness? Feeling," said Mr. Macabodo, "the awkwardness of my position as custodier of such a document, I took it this afternoon to this same Mr. John, or Jan Beal, for his professional opinion as to what I ought to do in the circumstances; and the gentleman gave me his opinion, sure enough, but in rather a novel way—by locking up the paper in his desk, and telling me to walk!"

All this, with a flood of laughter, and the great bouncing tears in his eyes, poor Macabodo narrated to them, till he was as rosy in the face as the sun of a winter's morning. Oh, poverty! sealed long winter of life, the Professor's hair was as white as snow!

Beal flatly denied the whole story. "Was there ever," he said, "such a palpable falsehood?" (Jan was a sickly man, of middling stature.) "I—I take a paper by sheer maistry from a great, strong, fat fellow like Macabodo! But I'll teach the ass a lesson he'll not forget to the end of his impoverished days."

Which of the two to believe? The onus of suspicion, Mr. Rollockson observed, lay undoubtedly with Macabodo; but on this point his friend Melethor differed with him.

"You appear to have taken an odd fancy to this Macabodo," said the wealthy writer to the signet; "I tell you the man's a needy adventurer, well known on 'Change both in Edinburgh and Leith, in Haddington, Dalkeith, and many other adjacent markets."

To this replied Melethor: "That may

be, James; and for that very reason I incline to think the limb of the devil Beal must have got the better of Mac, poor beggar, in the summary manner he says. I have had some little opportunity of studying the Professor, as you derisively call him; his pride is at least quite equal to his necessities, for both, I suspect, are great; and, depend upon it, he would not have told a ludicrous story upon himself, had there not been too much truth in it."

In the mean time, an accidental trace of the paper was obtained through Rachel Shore and her brother.

Next day Miss Rachel was confined to the house by a headache; but in the afternoon, the weather being still fine, to clear off the *ennui*, she asked her brother Frederick to take a walk with her. "The very thing I was about to propose," said

Mr. Fred; "I feel like yourself, Rech, a little seedy."

Fred was much about Rachel's own age, a year older or younger, I am not sure which. They were soon beyond the town, and going over the same ground as yesterday: Meldrum's mill path was a favourite walk into the country.

"You're uncommonly serious to-day, Rachel," said the brother; "what's the matter?"

"You said, a little ago, I was seedy."

"Oh, bother!" continued Fred, "that's all very well in a man, when there's a known and ascertained cause; but it's different with a—a——In short, Rech, I see there's something vexing you, *ma pauvre*; so tell me what it is." (The little coxcomb was not deficient of fraternal regard in his way.) "We were at Macbriar's last

night, and I am, as I said, a little seedy ; consequently can promise you a sympathetic listener."

It would, perhaps, be unfair, even if it were not impossible, to follow Miss Rachel through all the winding inquiries by which she endeavoured to get, so to speak, to the very bottom of what people were saying now to her supposed engagement to Melethor Deerness ; for Fred she believed heard everything, besides having the name of being a special conjuror in matters of that sort. She did not know—she could not think, she said, what cloud was coming over the Master. Sometimes she thought it might be *that* Mr. Macabodo, and a cloud of business ; sometimes——In short, whatever the cause might be, she never saw a man so changed.

The brother heard her to an end.

“Rech,” said Mr. Fred, in a low voice, “there’s a Hagar in the house.”

“You mean the girl Morland,” said Rachel. “Oh, well, I thought so at first myself, but I don’t think so now.”

Mr. Fred smiled.

“That’s to say, you were struck with her at first, but now you have got used to her. My dear Rech, I know the world—I know men—perhaps a little of the others, too; don’t hoodwink yourself here, I advise you. Black or white, that girl’s the cloud you were speaking of that’s come over Melethor. It would give his pride a deuce of a wrench to marry her, no doubt; but for fear of accidents—for he would marry her in that case—the best thing is to get him cured of the fancy. Hagar, my dear Rech, must be got out of the house.”

“But how?” asked Miss Rachel; “for

though I disliked her at first, and don't much like her yet, I would not like to take any shabby advantage of her."

"*Shabby* advantage—no—nor would I; but perhaps I may be able to put you up to a wrinkle that will do for her in Melethor's eyes. I had it from Raby."

"What is it?" said the sister, eagerly.

"Well, it's not just the length of telling yet. But what would you say if this girl that they all think so much of, is a fabricator of the most monstrous stories, and as hypocritical a mischief-maker as ever crept into an unsuspecting family?"

"But what stories? I never heard of any," said Miss Rachel. To do her justice, although she might not have objected to hear of something certain to the ruin, or at all events to the expulsion, of Effie Morland, she was neither so wicked nor so weak as to jump at an improbable report.

So she said, firmly, "I don't believe one word of it; Effie Morland's no such character; and if Raby Deerness told you so, Fred, he's a——"

"Hush, my dear Rech! hush! hush! hush! You don't know what you're talking. You may have heard nothing as yet, but it won't be long before you do."

They had a much longer conversation ere they reached the termination of their walk (for the pair had always abundance to say), but the above is all that is necessary to our present purpose—that is to say, by way of preface, or preparatory to the sequel of their talk.

The afternoon was verging towards evening, when the brother and sister, the former proposing to turn, paused at the entrance to Meldrum's mill glen just above the mill. It was a cunning stroke of Mr. Fred to call Effie Hagar. The little pa-

triarchal bias in that direction could be but temporary; there could be no doubt of the ultimate and permanent triumph of Sarah. Rachel proposed, therefore, that, as they had come so far, they should go down to the mill and call on their old nurse Nannie Weir, the miller's wife. The mill, as well as the moor, belonged to Melethor, so that Miss Rachel, having here the charm of a double association, rarely took her walk in that direction without calling to have a gossip with her old nurse Nannie Weir.

Mr. Fred made no objections; the hour, the scene, were inviting in a climate that so seldom has the languid temptation of fine weather to offer to the seedy and the lounge. Under the light of the declining sun the mill looked very pretty down in the bottom of the hollow, with its quaint and dusty lofts, and its superincumbent

pond, long-drawn from the narrow dell, but concealed in the greater part of its tedious length by the dwarf willows which in such sheltered situations grow to a considerable height. The whole had that secluded and even wooded appearance of mystery which constitutes, in artists' phrase, a charming nook. A donkey-cart creeping out—it was going the other way, up between the duck green and the pond—was the only visible sign of traffic. On their crossing the wooden bridge which placed them in the midst of the premises, another at the mill door was preparing to start.

The "seedy" Mr. Fred looked around him for a moment in his collar—then stooped and followed his sister, who, having already entered the dwelling-house, was receiving the shrill greetings of the inmate, a little joyfully elevated, perhaps,

from the circumstance that Mrs. Wittle was alone in the house, and had been so, to use her own expression, “plowtering the greater part of the day.”

Nannie Wittle, *née* Weir, was a meagre, eager, bent, dust-sweeping, gain-scraping looking body, with still a sort of bloom in her cheek, as if she had been pretty in her youth, but, growing avaricious and fretful, had oldened before her time; which, indeed, was Nannie's case. The world and the world's gear, and the good-man, had transformed the blithest and buxomest servant lass in all Kirkwal sixteen years ago, into a complete shrew for the crumbs of lucre. But for all that Nannie was a piece of sterling stuff, true to nature, and always glad to see the young people from the house she had “once served in;” drudgery and thrift were all forgotten as often as Nannie had an opportunity of flinging herself into

a seat and exclaiming, "Eh! Miss Rachel, a blink o' you is good for a puir burdened body?" Even her avarice was not proof on such occasions, and usually played her household a fine trick, as she would lavish upon her young visitors an ovation in bread and milk and honey, or whatever better she had to offer, thereby creating an inlake which it would take her a week, by dint of grumbling and pinching, to recover out of her few domestic retainers.

With Mr. Fred, Mrs. Wittle was not so familiar as with his sister; she did not see him so often; the expensive young coxcomb inspired Nannie Wittle with sentiments of respectful awe. Thus the question had been trembling on her tongue from the moment of his entrance, but it was not until she perceived the first symptoms of their going, that she ventured to put it:

“And the town will be very gay, Mr. Frederick, I reckon, just now? and, Mr. Frederick, do you ever see our Willie?”

“Oh yes,” Mr. Fred replied, with gracious carelessness, “I see him coming and going.”

Now, Willie Wittle—and thereby hangs the tale at present—was the hope and prop of the house, being apprenticed to Mr. John Beal, and coming out, as the fond mother said, to the law, the profession next after the pulpit, perhaps, which the aspiring among the Scottish lower orders are most ambitious of raising their offspring to.

While the mother was in the act of talking of her “clever Willie,” her “wonderful laddie,” the identical Willie, three hours before his usual time of coming home, came in with a face of woe.

“Willie, my bairn,” cried the alarmed

mother, "what's the matter with thee—has anything happened to thy master?"

"Naething to the maister, mithers, but muckle to me," answered Willie. "I'm ruined, that's all; dismissed, set about my business, struck from the list of procurators, cut off in my green sleeves, oo—oo—oo!" And hiding his face in his hands, and both on the table, the boy raised a loud blubbering cry of lamentation.

"But what hast thou done, Willie, to be dismissed?" cried his mother—"oh, what hast thou done?"

After a little coaxing from Miss Rachel, and a little virtuous threatening from Mr. Fred, Willie was persuaded to sit up and tell his sad story. He told it with one eye up, the other down, looking all the while a genuine, though whimsical, mixture of simplicity and contrition.

"The accusation," said Willie, "is for

endeavouring to make away with a title deed in favour of Mr. Raby Deerness, to all and hale the lands of Bletherentlet and Hurlit valley, as at present rented in tack by——”

“ Never mind the description,” said Mr. Fred.

“ Aweel, sir, aweel, you’re maybe right ; the suner I forget the lang’age now the better. But as this concerns the Hallow family, you’ll maybe report me favourably to the laird ; it would be hard to be turned out o’ the mill, forby. In the month of October twelvemonth before his death, old Mr. Deerness called at the office one day and left a packet to be delivered to Mr. Beal when he came home, but instead of coming next day, he was three days behind time. I was ower head and ears in a wheen papers he had left me to copy. Beal cam hame in one of his humours, the papers

didna please him, it was huff ane ower ither, and the short and the lang is, I forgot all about the packet Mr. Deerness left. That's the truth and bottom o' the hale matter, mither, as I shall have to answer!

“I must confess, however, I dinna come just sae clean out in the sequel. About a week after, something brought the packet to my recollection; I searched for it, but couldn't find it, and concluding that it must have fallen of its own accord into Beal's hands, if he said nothing about it, as little, I thought, need I.

“Pass over twelve months. One morning, in the beginning of this current month of November, he set me to hunt up the copy of an old lease he had occasion to refer to, and whiles I was about this, as little thinking about my downfa' as a laverock in the lift (the Lord pardon and

pity!), I cam upon the missing packet in one of the files on the sleeping shelf! The wax of the seal had given way through time. Inside there was a note alang with it of a few lines, saying it was now complete, and for Mr. Beal to take charge as instructed. Woe was me, the enclosure referred to was the title deed in question! I took it hame with me——”

“ Oh, Willie, Willie, why did you do that ?” cried the mother.

“ You’ll hear, you’ll hear,” proceeded Willie: “ it’s easy saying, ‘ Why did you do that ?’ mither, but if you had been in the guilty fright I was in, hame’s just the first place you would have thought o’ yoursel’. So I put the disposition in my jacket pocket. I required time to think. The felonious purpose, as he wyted and raged at me of making away with the deed, never once entered my head; but I wasna just

such a simpleton neither (if it could be helped) as be brought in for sucken through a fault of memory. I'm on my confession, mithier, if not my oath. I'll not lee. I knew your prying disposition, and that with such a face as I then had the paper would not be safe in the house a single night from your clutches. This caused me alter my plan, and in a kind of desperation to let it fend for itsel', I laid it the first night in the auld Pict's house. Next morning it was all safe, and I began to think it was safer there than in any other hiding-hole I could contrive, as the superstitious country bodies were fear'd at the bit. But alace ! alace ! yesterday morning, when I looked in, it was gone ! I went at once to Beal and gave mysel' up, and if I didna ken preceesly what my fate would be, I had a gey and gude guess at it. All yesterday he raged, and damned, and

swore like a person out of his judgment, but to-day he was quieter; sae he cam to me in the afternoon just as the kirk clock was chappin' three, and told me to go. I wadna, Miss Rachel, I wadna, Mr. Shore, wish my warst enemy the heart that I had in my mouth when I put on my bannet and gaed to the door!"

"But, my bairn," said Nannie Wittle, "thou art nae the thief o' the paper after all. Whae's got it now?"

"Ay, ay," replied Willie, "that's the bit, and mair than I can tell; but say I could give a gude guess—say I suspect Macabodo—what's my word or say worth now? nothing!" And Willie laid down his head and fell to bemoaning his hapless fate again.

Mr. Fred promised to intercede with Mr. Deerness for Willie, and they took leave of the afflicted Nannie Wittle.

Surprise and a mixture of feelings held both silent until they were out of the mill hollow ; when on the brow of the ascent, the sight of the open country, suffused in the last purple flush of evening, set Mr. Fred's glib gab a-tinkling again like a bell. His language had often a flippant sound, but he was a serious youth in his own way.

" Here's a jolly termination to a seedy walk !" said he ; " my I.O.U.s are looking up. Who the deuce could have expected this ?"

Miss Rachel, who was no less amazed, could only put in the mean time the comparatively unimportant inquiry, " What did he mean by his I.O.U.s ?"

" Raby Deerness owes me money," replied Fred.

" But," said Rachel, " the whole thing,

what does it mean, for I don't seem to understand it at all?"

"It means that South Hallow's Raby's—half the estate; you understand what that is?"

"But this paper—what did the boy call it, title deed?—will it stand in law?"

"Well, that's just the question," said the brother; "I see you understand it perfectly, my dear Rech. From all I have heard, and from the straightforward way that comical little ghoul of Beal's tells his story, I think there can be no doubt that the deed is genuine. I expect, however, there will be a bit of a bobbery about it: and this enables me to explain what I could not before. Last night, at Mull's, Raby gave me a sort of hint, in confidence, about a lost paper, that would alter the face of things if it could only be discovered,

and—mark what follows—that the new preacher and his sister, bent belike on catching Melethor for themselves, were prepared to utter God knows all what stories to his prejudice.”

“They are poor, these Morlands, are they not?” This was put in a parenthesis.

“As Job,” said Fred.

“I have heard it said,” continued Rachel, “of the clergy who spring from nothing, that some of them are dirty dogs; I don’t know this young man, Morland, having only just seen him, but I should hardly be disposed to think so badly of the sister.”

“*There may not be the same necessity now,*” observed Mr. Fred in a low voice, and with a face of infinite diplomacy.

“What did he mean?” Miss Rachel

asked, drawing a little, a very little, off from him.

“Oh, well, plain and out’s the best,” replied this model brother. “You mustn’t let your vanity, my dear Rech, be offended at what I am now about to say. It’s for your good, and, besides, it’s between ourselves. *Entre nous*, then, I have long remarked that we have been blowing at but a cold peat in this Melethor—that his fancy for you is not, you understand, the burning and shining light it might have been. And then Melethor’s so high and unmanageable! It strikes me there might be worse investments than a transfer to Raby.”

“Monstrous! entirely out of the question!” cried the girl, really very much shocked.

“I’ll light my pipe, and by that time you’ll have cooled a bit,” said Fred.

Charging and lighting his pipe accordingly, he resumed : " Why monstrous ? if the Master's indifferent to you."

" But he's not indifferent to me !" cried Rachel, " and you're a scandalous little callous wretch to say so !"

" Bother, Rachel ! what's the use of nonsense here ? there's just our two selves. If Melether's indifferent to you, and you, I should fancy and hope, can be as indifferent to him, where's the harm or impropriety of trying Baby ? You and he have all along been the best of friends at any rate. He may not, I grant you, have so much snappish cleverness as the other, but he's better natured, and much the handsomer of the two."

" That I deny," said Miss Rachel, emphatically ; " Baby is neither so handsome nor so good-looking as his brother. Be-

sides, in a few years he will be as stout as Markus Skeldar."

"Oh, oh! well," laughed Mr. Fred, "and say he should be up to the jolly *Mark*" (being an esprit, Mr. Fred, of course, had his bon mot or pun now and then), "I have a notion, my dear Rech, you will by that time be no light weight yourself—more of a Lady Bletherentlet than a sylph. Take my advice, and let that objection be another addition to the solid advantages of the match."

Here the conversation dropping, there was a long silence of nearly ten minutes. Her air, her manner of walking—not trippingly, but with a foot of serious deliberation—all showed that Miss Rachel was seriously weighing the sound advice just given her. But, inconsistent mortals that we are! whether from sheer whim

and caprice, or from something important on the other side having occurred to him during that ten minutes' interval, I am not at present enabled to say, but the fact is certain, her brother began to retract the advice he had given.

“I see, Rech,” he said, “that you have already effected the exchange; confess you are ready to commence operations upon Raby immediately! Now, after giving the matter the most anxious reconsideration, I feel rather disposed to retract that advice; at all events, greatly to modify it. In such a choice of uncertainties we must not forget the important fact that Mrs. Deerness has set you down for Melethor; your own natural choice inclines that way, and he is still the head of the house if Raby were Bletherentlet to-morrow. To alter the old saw a little, we must be

sure that the old love is off with *us* before we are on with the new. You needn't look so disgustfully at me neither, Rech; all this, I am well aware, sounds horrid mercenary, but I know it for a fact you have been so brought up from almost a child to look forward to this alliance of the two houses, that it must be very hard to see you disappointed, more especially now that you have two chances to one, or, as it is vulgarly called, two strings to your bow. I am a plain character, you know, Rech, and make no pretensions, unless it be to a little drop of natural affection, and an eye in my head to the interests of my family."

To this Miss Rachel offered no reply. With all her faults, her imperious vanity, and personal insolence of manner when offended, she had some latent principle,

and when subjected to severe pressure a well of relenting ruth, compared with the shrewd little coxcomb of a brother. It was he, and he alone, who contrived the snare for poor Effie, of which a short account will be found in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

THEY ARE ASKED TO DINE AT LIGHTFOOT PRIORY — COMMENCEMENT OF HOSTILITIES BETWEEN EFFIE AND MR. FRED, THE LADY-KILLER.

THE families of Belyewane and Mount Pleasant were asked to spend next day at Mr. Cuthbert Balfeur's in the country. The day, though not quite so fine as the two or three preceding had been, was yet sufficiently promising to muster a tolerably large walking party; Melethor, having engagements that would detain him in town, was to drive over Rollockson and his

brother William (who, being a special favourite of the elder brother's, was taken into their confidence); Weatherby also had engagements with *his* man of business, and would be similarly detained; so that it fell in a manner naturally to Mr. Fred Shore to put himself at the head of the excursion on foot.

It was proposed to go round by Mel-drum's moor, in order to enjoy the beautiful walk down the glen below the mill.

They were at the mill by about twelve o'clock, and while Rachel looked in for just a moment on Mrs. Wittle, the others, gathering round the pond, had a talk with the ducks. While this latter conversation was going on, Mr. Fred drew the Jolly-boat aside a little, and producing a very handsome pocket flask, observed that some things were necessarily hidden from the *ducks*.

"Here's to them, whatever," said the Jollyboat.

"Hush, old fellow—tot of noon!" said Mr. Fred; "if Rech knew of this it would make her sulky for half an hour."

"Then why do you take it?"

"Oh! why—well, you see Cromarty came up from Caithness last night, and he would have a lot of us to meet him in Mull's, and Rech says it was past one o'clock before I came home. That's just the deuce of women, they're so prying and suspicious of drink they drive a fellah to take thrice what he would."

Rejoined by Rachel, they proceeded down the glen, the path in general being sufficiently obstructed to render it interesting by the willows and other shrubs growing in the bottom as well as hanging in profusion from the rocky sides; while every here and there were open, unencum-

bered bits of sward, where they could stop and get up a little general conversation, or a game at "*tig*," or set Grouse and the Jellyboat to "groutle" in the burn (I am not sure of the orthography of the expression) under the stones for a trout. In this latter amusement Mr. Fred, being too much a man of his years to join, or, as Grouse hinted, to bare his stalwart arm, he played the part of an indulgent and highly amused spectator.

Near the bottom of the glen, where it wheels round the base of Whirrel-butts Hill, whose purple heath-covered cone was seen towering above, just at hand, with a strong sunlight upon it in front, and a heavy shower-cloud coming up behind, a halt was called, to consider whether they should proceed, or take shelter from the approaching shower where they were. There were two arguments in favour of

the latter. In the first place, the glen below the "Crook of Whirrel" was much more open and exposed ; and in the second place, under an overhanging great green mossy boulder where they were, was a famous pool for a groutle. So it was carried to remain until the shower should pass over.

"Cozy this," said Mr. Fred, gathering his brood about him, as though they had nothing to do but to enjoy the coming shower—and so they did, very much, until he put a stop to their enjoyment—the darkening of the sky, the drooping and trembling of the bushes, the rush of the wind up the water, and the swelling, responsive sound of the stream itself, as if it already anticipated the flooding contribution. Suddenly it grew very dark in the dell itself, and then down poured the rain,

heavy, pattering through the bushes, and spirting on the groutlers in the pool.

Huddled here together, Miss Deerness, after looking up at the sky for some time with a fixed yet wandering expression, as Effie remarked, suddenly introduced the sort of conversation that Miss Rachel's brother for the last hour had been brooding to bring about.

"I wonder," said Harriet, "what it is that's in the wind at home just now? for there's something; I'm sure of that. Mamma had a call from John Beal yesterday. And that's a crow that's no good sign."

"What will you give me if I tell you?" said the male Shore.

"Fred!" remonstrated Rachel.

"Hold your tongue, Rech. Miss Deerness may as well hear from us now what I suppose will be side and wide by the time we get back again. The fact is, there has

been a posthumous title found, leaving Hallow between Melethor and Raby. Melethor gets the north, and Raby the south."

He expected that this would cause a panic, and it did. "Discovered!" cried Miss Deerness. "Where? how? Does mamma know of this?" And then followed fainting symptoms.

While Rachel and Effie untied her bonnet-strings, and held her face so as to catch the reviving rain-drops, the latter said, in a low voice, to Mr. Fred: "This had better go no further, Mr. Shore. What you say may be the case, or it may not: you have chosen an ill time for such a piece of news."

"She has fainted," said Rachel. "For God's sake, Frederick, run and fetch some water in your cap."

"Make no noise about it," said Fred,

not wishing to alarm the others. He stepped to the stream, and returned with his cap filled. A single handful sufficed; the swoon was only partial, and the whole thing was managed so quietly, that neither Grouse nor Jerrold heard anything of it till some time after.

“Where are we?” The first few words of her coming round were spoken with a kind of laughing shiver. “Oh, Rachel, I dreamed that we were drowned! How very cold and dark it is! Has anything happened?” (Mr. Frederick, who was standing by with his dripping cap full of water, made a bow, explanatory or deprecatory, as the case might be.) “Ah, I remember now. And so poor Weatherby’s independent—his wishes and the prophecy have come true at last! But how and where did you hear this? Tell me all about it, Mr. Frederick.”

Mr. Frederick, with another still lower bow, replied :

“ Much may supervene, Miss Deerness, in the short space of even half a minute’s nap. I am interdicted from saying anything further on this subject by Miss Effie Morland.”

“ Do *you* know anything about this, Effie ?” asked her friend.

Effie, perceiving the sort of trap that was being laid for her, turned it aside (as she hoped) with this perfectly true, though evasive reply :

“ I told Mr. Frederick Shore, when you were like to faint upon our hands, that he had chosen a very ill time to give you such a piece of news. He is no further under any interdict from me. And if your curiosity, my dear Harriet”—(both the Shores wore a supercilious look that fired our Effie’s spirit a little here, and she was

determined to let them see she could act the fine lady as well as any of them)—“and if your curiosity, my dear Harriet, cannot wait till you see your mamma, but would like to hear all that Mr. Frederick has to say, don't let me stand in the way. I'll go and see what sport my friend Grouse is getting.”

So saying, Effie walked to the pool and stood looking on in silence at the groutlers, with a hurt feeling at heart amounting almost to novelty after playing the fine lady; with a smile, yet a sad face enough, she stood, as it were, lost in amusement, looking at the lads, her favourite Grouse scuttling and almost diving under water like an otter, in his eagerness after the fish; while, with shirt-sleeve tucked to the shoulder, the great burly back of the stooping Jollyboat heaved and groaned in the intensity of his efforts to

extract a trout from under a large stone to which he had traced it, at the same time the fast increasing water rendering his chance of success every moment more and more desperate. At length he gave it up with a loud "Confound it!" and turned round so sharply as to surprise Effie, standing behind him with the tears in her eyes.

"Hey, Effie, what's the matter?" He was a great, kindly lump, sharp enough sighted in all matters of that kind. "Hast thou and they been casting out?" Effie answered it was nothing. "Nothing!" cried Joll; "by my sowl that means *something*; sae come thy wa's wi' me, and since I've lost the trout, I'll try if I canna expiscate the quarrel."

But Effie, taking his arm, detained him; laughing, but speaking seriously, she said:

"My dear Mr. Jerrold, let me beg of you to make no allusion to anything of the

kind. Indeed, there has been no quarrel; only your friend, Mr. Frederick Shore, frightened your sister with an idle rumour he has picked up somewhere, and I, a little sharply, it seems, bade him desist." She mentioned the nature of the rumour, and was struck by the similarity of expression to his sister; his colour went and came; and if he did not faint (being a man), it was obvious that Mr. Jerrold looked exceedingly grave and disconcerted.

As soon as the shower was over, our party left cover, and continued their walk to Lightfoot Priory, the seat of Mr. Cuthbert Belfeur, where they arrived about two o'clock. But what an effort was that last half of the walk to Effie! Naturally, Effie possessed a good deal of sprightly ease and talent for conversation, but this was only when she was drawn out, or when the flow was general. To-day, however, was an

exception—Effie was brilliant. Was it that she wished to set at defiance Miss Rachel's lugubrious looks—the pedantic moralisings, in which every other sentence contained an infernal inuendo, of her jackanapes brother? or was it that unaccountable exaltation of the spirits which we Scotch call *fey*, now held by the learned, as it was formerly by the ignorant, to be the sure precursor of misfortune to the party so possessed?

As soon as they got to the Priory, Miss Deerness came to her privately, and said, “What is it, Effie?” and Effie, laughing through her tears, answered, “A little spite, Miss Deerness, nothing more. I thought that for such a professed lady-killer, your friend Mr. Frederick was a little too hard upon me—and—and had I been a man,” said Effie, “there's no saying what might have been the end of it!”

I don't intend to delay the story with an account of a dinner-party at Lightfoot Priory. It is with the home-coming from the said dinner that we are now more immediately concerned.

They are a sociable but a punctual people the more modernised gentry of Thule, not like some of the regardless worthies of the old stock, who still set all hours at defiance. At ten o'clock carriages and vehicles of various kinds, some of them rude and primitive enough, drew up in string before the Priory to take the company home. The Mount Pleasant family ark carried off Mrs. Shore and Mrs. Deerness and their daughters; those who lived within reasonable walking distance, walked; our boys had a kind of tumbril cart to themselves; Melethor, who was driving Rollockson in his own gig, gave him a hint to find a seat with some other of the

gentlemen going to town, and our learned friend got the vacant *vis-à-vis* in Macbriar's "wardrobe," a strange-looking cabinet conveyance which the drawing-room Mephistopheles kept expressly for going out to dinner in; Effie being thus promoted to the seat in the gig vacated by the W. S.

Miss Morland expected nothing less than a catechising on the road home; and something of the kind was perhaps intended, but it was postponed. He merely said, that as there was not room for her in the family ark, she would be rather safer with himself than with those boys in the tumble, who had all taken fully as much as they could carry. And this was verified by the noise they were making. They could hear Weatherby challenging the Jollyboat to a competition in song; and, both striking up together, they made a

sweet and effective duet, accompanied by the alternating clatter of the tumbril, as it caracoled along the hard stony road, and anon plunged into silence among the heather by the roadside. This amused for a while, and saved conversation, but gradually, the tumbril shooting more and more ahead, the sounds died upon the night, and Effie was left to her own reflections as the gentleman appeared to be to his, while the Master's smart-pacing chesnut went bobbing and footing it behind the family ark, as though (like certain other personages who walk behind) it could not help caricaturing the sober pace of the venerable equipage.

What, in the mean time, might have been the tenor of the conversation in the interior of that sable receptacle, we can only conjecture. Belyewane exhibited the usual lights and bustle of a dinner-party

home-coming from the country : first, the boys, then their mother and sister, and then——Effie, on her arrival, got just a glimpse of Mrs. Deerness in her gorgeous mourning robe of black satin, as, with a bedroom candle in a small silver candlestick, she crossed the hall and disappeared up-stairs to appear no more that night.

CHAPTER X.

LOGAN IS SENT FOR AND COMES TO TOWN.

THE rain-cloud that passed over the walking party in Meldrum's glen, spread its blackness over parson Logan also in his Patmos out the way; and just while it was at the darkest our hero had a mysterious visitation that shook him to the very soul.

It turned out afterwards — after the story was all over — that Morland was much hampered in his investigations by

the contrivance of a very singular incident. On the day above spoken of, during that fearful shower (for in Hallow it was accompanied with thunder and lightning), sitting alone in his own parlour, he had a call from a visitor that greatly agitated, and, to speak the plain truth, frightened him. There came in an old man begging, of a most forbidding appearance, hoary and ragged, and slung round with two great bags. The beggar quite coolly sat down uninvited, and offered to tell him his fortune, which of course the parson declined. (What would he not have given for miller Bisset to have come in at that moment!) The horrid old man taking offence, as it seemed, at the rejection of his offer, began to use profane and insolent language; he then said to Logan, since he was too much of a priest to have the whole, he would tell him a piece of his fortune for nothing;

and in a threatening and mysterious strain spoke of his impending journey to Kirkwal, telling him that as he valued the life and happiness of Mrs. Deerness, and hinting, above all, as he hoped to stand well with Miranda, that he must abstain from questioning his sister. This the mendicant, with a frightful menace, made Logan promise. That old beggar man was——

Next morning witnessed the sequel of these premonitory symptoms. Effie, at the information of the Shores, was tried before Mrs. Deerness and a domestic assize in reference to the language held by her yesterday when they were stopped by the shower in Meldrum's mill glen; and although the proceedings were conducted with all polite consideration, and the Master stood by to see her get fair play, still it was a sore trial to Effie. She adhered to her resolution, however, and

rather than be the cause of more mischief and misery than she could tell, was prepared to suffer in the mean time any amount of personal obloquy and distrust. Effie answered to the charge generally, that she was very angry at Mr. Frederick Shore for his want of consideration, and if she seemed to contradict his statement, she spoke on the impulse of the moment, as of what she could not but think an unfounded report; especially, Effie added, when she saw how it affected Miss Deerness. Her friend Harriet was warm in defence. She said that the construction sought to be put upon a few simple words was entirely an insinuation of Frederick Shore, who was a nasty, little, dissipated, self-conceited, slandering puppy. Her mother checked her, otherwise there is no saying to what length the vituperation of Mr. Fred might have run.

But although acquitted, so to speak, on her trial, Effie's unhappiness could not escape the eyes of a mother in Israel like Mrs. Deerness, and the result was that the Lady of Hallow forthwith wrote a letter, and sent off Captain Kith in the *Tom Tub* for the parson. In this despatch the sole reason assigned for bringing him to town was the state of parties. "The town is very gay, and there are a great many clergy of all denominations *except ours*, and I really need you to come and help me," &c. &c.

Now this was, in a great measure, the real truth. Mrs. Deerness was much too clear-sighted to believe that Effie was really guilty under the present surmised charge and an intermeddling pryer into private family affairs; but she was very angry and very uneasy about Rachel—her eldest son's visibly growing indifference to

her—the jokes of the boys—and—and, in short, the sooner Effie returned with her brother to Hallow the better. With every confidence in her son's pride—and her own—nature, I suppose, must have whispered her that Effie would be as well out of the way. Above all, she wanted Logan's aid to help her in repulsing the Erastians, who were daily becoming more and more aggressive in the family under the leadership of that proud, domineering kinsman of theirs, Pope Caldwell Gilchrist.

Captain Kith had a rapid run out in the *Tom Tub*, and Logan was expected to dinner; but the wind continuing adverse to the return voyage, and to rise about the time they should have left Hallow, they gave up hope of seeing him that night.

It was fully half-past nine, verging to ten, when, pale and drenched after his rough passage, our hero made his appearance in the drawing-room at Belyewane.

“Logan!” cried Effie; and in an instant all save Miss Rachel were in a commotion, giving cordial welcome to the adventurous envoy.

“What a passage you must have had!” said Mrs. Deerness. “We did not look for you to-night. Harriet, get some tea immediately.”

“Nonsense, mamma!” cried the Jolly-boat; “it’s about time supper was on the table, at any rate, and that’s worth twenty cups of tea to a wet skin.”

“Are you wet?” asked Melethor.

“A little,” replied the hero of the night; “and if Mrs. Deerness will allow me, I beg to second Mr. Jerrold’s motion of supper.”

“Surely!” And off went the boys with their prize to have him rigged out in something dry of “the laird’s.”

Meantime (all honour to the cloth!), Bruce,

and Harriet, and Effie, and Mrs. Deerness too, all lent a hand, while Miss Rachel, at a loss to conceive what all the sudden hubbub and bustle could be about, sat wondering on the sofa, like a coloured print of Amazement. There must be something in the newly arrived wight over and above his clerical profession: what could it be? So reasoned within herself the daring as well as foolish girl.

His host's coat fitted him not so far amiss, and on the whole Logan thought it a mighty agreeable novelty as well as improvement to his figure. It would take a chapter to hold all the good things he said at supper. Miss Rachel was at her wits' end what to think of him. She, ordinarily the most brilliant at table, completely eclipsed—silent, and yet her voice never missed! By what baleful magic was this—this horrid *tablemare*?

But one little laugh they got at our friend may fairly be recorded here. At the final gathering round the hearth as they were planning how to make the most of his short visit, Jerrold Jollyboat, in his superabundant fashion, suggested that the best way would be to let it out a bit, to say double or three times the length.

"Quite impossible," Logan said; "a week was his ultimate limit."

Melethor regretted that, as Friday week was the Banquet of Odin, and he should so much have liked him to be present.

"The banquet of what?—of Odin?" cries the parson. "Good Heavens! do you mean to tell me that these rites, or anything approaching to them, are still kept up?"

This naïve horror was of course the signal for an uproarious peal of laughter; and his host explained that the banquet

was merely a public dinner, and had nothing of Odin but the name. "The name," he said, "which they still kept up in frolic, was originally applied to them as a sneer by a polished but somewhat sarcastic clergyman of Orkney—the Reverend Caldwell Gilchrist, a kinsman of their own."

Logan was up betimes in the morning, and out before breakfast. Very different was the aspect of Kirkwal now, in our envoy's eyes, and with Grouse for pilot, notwithstanding the morning was spitting a little, he explored the greater part of the town. Then back to breakfast, at which, of course, my friend said grace. Melethor asked him what he was to be about in the shape of spending the day.

Mrs. Deerness answered for him. "Mr. Morland is going to make some calls with me."

They had a short private interview before going out ; but Mrs. Deerness was too full of the anticipated day's happiness, and the evangelical treat of introducing him to her friends in town, to blur the bright prospect in the least by any allusion to the affair of Effie. That was for an after diet. But in the mean time, Logan himself had that to say to Effie which admitted of no postponement, and accordingly he requested that he might have a few minutes' conversation with her.

"Effie," said he, "ever since you left me, I have been excessively annoyed and disturbed by that girl Charlotte Kith. You never would allow me to say she is deranged in her mind, though I think she is. Judge ! Ever since you left, as I said, she has gone about the house, either muttering to herself, or dogging my heels with mysterious hints — hints of I know not

what—of some frightful secret which she and you have between you.”

“Did Kith say that?” asked Effie. The assertion, as she suspected, was made in great measure at a venture, but she could not conceal her agitation.

“In the name of goodness, what is this?” continued Logan. “If any secret affecting our friends here has come to your knowledge through this absurd girl—for I will not suppose the converse, that it came from you to her—why was it not instantly confided to me?”

“I’ll not tell a lie, Logan. There is a secret, if it can be called such, that has no distinct shape; but I am not at liberty to repeat it even to you, brother. It came to me through Kith. There’s no evidence, that I know of, except Charlotte’s own statement.” And Effie went on to say that

she would fain hope it might turn out one of Kith's reveries, in the weaving of which, as he knew, she had a faculty of going great lengths. To that subjoined Logan :

“ At least I must be a better judge than either you or Kith of this concealed stuff—reverie, as you call it—whether it be fact or fiction ; *that*, at the very least, I insist upon—the removing the quality of concealment.”

Effie could only repeat that the thing, at present, was incommunicable.

“ Why, you foolish girl ?” cries he.

“ She had seen no signs,” she said, “ that could make it her duty, but the reverse.”

“ Or do you imagine,” cries Logan, “ that I will allow you to keep a secret that is making you so visibly thinner ? There's consumption in our Aunt Jane's family—two of the girls died of it—and I

will have no unnecessary risk here. Effie, if you do not confide this to me, I will instantly to Mrs. Deerness, and you will be forced to confess all to her! Silence! not a word till I have done. It is very evident that something has come underhand to your knowledge affecting Mrs. Deerness or her family; now I cannot, and will not, consent to your being mixed up with an idiot servant-girl as the sole judge and depositor in a case where it is just possible the consequence of your retention may be tremendous; and, therefore, I say I am resolved to absolve you of it. If this secret be such as to exercise so sinister and baleful an influence on your mind that you dare not tell it even to your own brother, it is full time it were smashed. Decide. Do you consent to trust me, or do I go to Mrs. Deerness?"

“Not to her, not to her,” pleaded Effie ;
“for mercy’s sake, do not a thing that you
will regret and repent for ever.”

“There is something in all this, sister
Effie,” said the parson, coldly and haughtily,
“that I really cannot understand; for when
all’s said and done, it just comes to this:
that you will not trust me. I am obliged
to you for the compliment to my prudence
and judgment.”

“No, Logan, it is you who so cruelly
distrust *me*. I don’t distrust your pru-
dence (Effie did, though, for all that), but
you seem to have a poor opinion of my
rectitude, when you insist on my disclosing
what I have told you I dare not disclose.
You have surely read of cases of peace
and life ruined by the thoughtless publica-
tion of an unjust slander or a groundless
suspicion.”

“Then you must believe the girl Kith’s story to be chimerical?”

“I try to believe that it must be,” said Effie, “even for his own sake, the foolish, handsome fellow! Will this satisfy you? I have taken every precaution—given him a hint—and the little I know I have written to be delivered, in case of necessity, to Mr. Deerness. More we have no right to, Logan, and more I cannot and will not anticipate. But should I see the sign——”

“When it may be too late!” cried Logan.

“I was about to say, you may refuse,” said Effie, “but you shall have no cause to reproach me for not seeking, your advice and assistance.”

Logan, though excessively nettled, angry, and dissatisfied, was obliged to rest content with this general promise, and, sensible

that his vacation week would soon glide away, to employ the time to better purpose than catechising a "wise sister." Between ourselves, there was metal more attractive.*

To return, however, to the story—to Logan's first day in the capital. The morning, we said, rose on the blast, with a congregation of clouds at its heels threatening a stormy day. In the south, wet weather generally drives us to cover; up here, in the north, it is just the reverse. Our Orkney friends, like their sea-fowl, seem positively to enjoy the exhilarating blast, and you will meet them in groups of two or three, sometimes

* There can be very little doubt, I think, that the parson's affair with Miranda proved a more saving and protective clause to Effie than his fear of the old beggarman's threats—open as these were to the suspicion of being a part of the plot.

the solitary individual, enjoying themselves in the most Orcadian manner imaginable.

The reader is therefore invited in the next chapter to a confidential walk with the author and the laird on his way to dine with Mr. Robert Belfeur of Abbeyhall.

CHAPTER XI.

A SOLITARY WALK ALONG THE BEACH — DISCOVERY OF A
TODDY-NEST, AND WHAT THE TODDY-BIRDS WERE SAYING
TO IT.

JUST as we were about to set out, the following note was brought by Robert, the Abbeyhall groom :

“Abbeyhall.

(“Private and confidential.”)

“MY DEAR MELETHOR,—If you are still in the same Christian mind, as I hope you are, of making it up with Belfeur, I wish very much you could take a run out to-

day—it's shocking weather, to be sure, but that you don't mind. I have a strong impression that the enemy must have made some sort of move lately in this direction. Ever since I came here the old boy has been dropping hints and talking of writing you. I never knew him so fretful and testy. On my asking him plump out to relieve his mind by communicating the matter to me, as your agent, he was as angry as if I had asked had he ever had the gout yet; I really thought he would have put me to the door. Come out, therefore, yourself.

“Ever, &c.,

“JAMES ROLLOCKSON.

“P.S.—Whether in connexion with the above or not I cannot say, but he has manifested an anxiety to know something of the antecedents of Miss M., which

you will probably think as singular as I did. The question has been put to me by one or two others of the people hereabout, as it were in a casual way, ‘What sort of a girl is that Miss M.?’ &c.”

Wrapped in our pilot-coats and travelling-caps, we left town about eleven o’clock. In a short private conversation of date that morning, his mother had said to him, putting the question quite suddenly and without any preface :

“Melethor, are you engaged to Rachel Shore, or are you not?”

“And what,” said he, “if I am not?”

“You may break off,” was the reply, “but you will be acting anything but like a gentleman.”

Sharp words these between mother and son. So that Melethor was just in the mood to wander abroad. Walking along the beach, under cover of the stormy booming

coast, the writer took the liberty to ask him whether there had ever been anything in that romance?

"Never," he replied, "I give you my word of honour; but Rachel has five thousand pounds, and the families have long been very intimate."

Of Effie he spoke like a gentleman. He seemed to attribute the spread of her name to Rollockson himself. "She is a stranger," he remarked, "and I suspect that James, with some of his gossiping jokes (which he is always the first to overlook), has given rise to these same inquiries respecting the antecedents of Miss M., which he crams so gravely into a post-script. I have scarcely any personal acquaintance with old Robert Belfeur, the gentleman with whom he is staying just now; but I can fancy the imposing face with which he would ask our flighty

friend, 'Do you know anything of that Miss M.,' &c. &c."

Rollockson was, in truth, a great curiosity—a gay, upright, humorous man of the world; in those days of the religious drawing-room, a spot in their feasts to our parson, his patroness, and the serious in general. He was a bachelor of some five-and-forty, not an irreligious man by any means; what he wanted was deportment. His integrity was unalloyed, but he was deficient in the perfect reverence for society. (Thus with Robert Belfeur, a prim, irascible old man, he was constantly, and almost unconsciously, taking jocular liberties, and very possibly, in this matter of Effie, a single word lightly spoken might be the cause of all the apprehensions at present fermenting in the old gentleman's mind.) A gormandising talker, his mixture of subjects was fright-

ful! He would carry on a double conversation with persons of the most opposite character, quite unconscious that there was any incongruity in doing so, with, say the Reverend Caldwell Gilchrist and Miss Rachel Shore, discussing Church politics and other stiff matter with Caldwell, and fashion and slip-slop with Shore; a man of quick sensibility, easily moved, a great laugh, even to tears. The women, before these serious days, all said, Was there ever so happy a creature as Rollockson? but they are always exaggerating. All this sunshine had its ratable proportion of shade; our learned and esteemed friend had his drawbacks; his health was not first rate—he sometimes complained of a morning; and over and within all, a nice observer could not fail to detect a shade or film of melancholy, memories gone up,

perhaps disappointments, that had but little affinity with the corporeal capers of a light and somewhat evanescent temperament.

Just as the Master had done giving me this sketch of his friend R., he descried, in a solitary bay, remote from any human habitation, a man having the appearance, he thought, of his steward Cults. "That's Cults," he said; "what can he be after here?" And quickening his pace, ere the man could have time to disappear round the next point, Cults it proved to be. Circumstances rendered it necessary to do a little stalking here, and we followed cautiously in the wake of Mr. Cults.

As steward Cults will be found to be a most important personage in our laird's establishment, and moreover to have a hand in the feud between the Shores and

Effie ; and, in short, as Will was such a shrewd, odd fellow withal, I must beg the reader's patience for a single minute.

William, or as Captain Kith and his contemporaries pronounced it, Whilem Cults, was a Scotchman—I rather think from the ancient kingdom of Fife. He had been land steward, and had the charge of their mainland property for many years. For the rest, Melethor knew him to be a bit of a smuggler and poacher, and he half suspected, at times, a little bit of a thief into the bargain ; but Will had been so long with them, and was such a favourite with the boys, he could not bring himself to look too closely into these little private intromissions.

But William Cults had other qualities that accounted for his tenacity of office. He knew the country ; his knowledge of the market, of people's circumstances, was

as accurate as extensive. Such a pathologist was of immense service to the laird in his dealings with brother proprietors.

In person, Cults was a short, square-built fellow, with a copper face, a wide mouth, and a coarse cast of features, that gave little indication of the sagacity he possessed. Strangers were struck with his peculiar address—plain and even blunt, yet so insinuating. Captain Kith and his compeers, with a Norse moral looseness bordering on the grotesque, absolutely venerated the cunning, tricky Scotch steward. To hear of their native lairds being beaten in bargain by Cults was meat and drink to them. “Na, noo then, what else did they expect? They most (must) not think to try their hand with *our* Mr. Whilem!” Indeed, it had come to this of late, that more than one of Melethor’s neighbours had dropped him, in

jocular hints, their serious opinion that his keeping that d—d Scotchman any longer was just barely reputable; but as these were the sufferers taken in fair effeir of war, having done their best to overreach the obnoxious Scot, Melethor only laughed, and advised them to take better care next time. A circumstance, however, of recent occurrence, had determined him to watch Cults more narrowly, and if he caught him overstepping his petty bounds, to dismiss him.


He suspected the present was a case of smuggling—the steward, with a basket on his arm, had mightily the air of a wooer stealing to a *small still* appointment. Thus tracked, Will disappeared round a third curve of the shore, and there we suddenly lost trace of him: in hunter's phrase, the game must either have taken to earth or stolen away. After looking

and snuffing the shore and the cliffs all round for a while, the fellow's master concluded the latter; the coast here was of no great height, not more than forty feet, and notched in the rock were some rude steps that served apparently as a passage round the point when the tide was in, it being then impassable by the beach. But as there was no necessity for this at present, the tide having been receding for more than an hour, the conclusion was that Mr. Cults's route now lay more up the country, or inland.

Dismissing the incident as unimportant, he motioned to continue our route along the shore. We walked on, but had not advanced above a dozen steps round the cape when he snuffed a taint of wood smoke near, and, looking over his shoulder, as his quick, smart manner was, he said, "Here they are!" Presently was heard a

loud chuckling laugh from the bowels of the rock, which he recognised at once as his steward's; and that again was followed by the sound of several voices raised in giving Cults a hearty welcome.

Whoever the party might be, he immediately comprehended in what sort of nest they had found a lodgment. The place was one of the fissures so common on these coasts. A number of huge blocks of rock fallen from the sides and jammed together in the mouth of the inlet rendered it inaccessible from beneath, and hence the steward's ascent to the interior (probably by the steps we noticed in passing), a full view of which was presently disclosed to the spectators outside by means of a rousing fire which the party were busy kindling. Standing on a square block of rock which the receding tide had just done lashing, the reader perceives we



are nearly on a level with the group within.

Sheltered from the rain, which was falling heavily down the dismal rent, in a round cave hollowed out of the side of the rock, and about the size of a baker's oven, four men were seated round a log fire: they were preparing to ransack the basket of provisions which Cults had just brought in, while William, his ruddy copper cheeks burnished by the mounting flame, and his wide mouth expanded into a grin of supreme satisfaction, received their congratulations with the leering gravity of a Silenus peeping into a nest of young Bacchanals.

"I say, Cloots," cried a small but very "natty" young gentleman, Mr. Fred Shore, Miss Rachel's brother, "upon my soul, you must be the devil! Where did you get such a jolly basketful? You

haven't had time to go to Kirkwal, and there's not a house within miles, except Hunger Hall, where they make three days kail and eat the beef on the fourth."

The sally was received with loud applause.

Cults replied : " That indeed he had laid his account with tramping all the way into Kirkwal, but fort'nately he happened to recollect that yesterday was Hungry Ha' 's annual dinner party, and it just occurred to him that if he could get a word of the laird or the ledly by themsels, he might shorten the road and be full (the u pronounced short, as in hull) cheaper than in town."


At this there was a roar of laughter—the Hunger Hall dinner was no fiction ; it was clear that his steward's impudent genius had actually tempted the miserly old laird or his wife to sell him a basketful

of their cold meat with a ratable proportion of liquor to wash it down.

“Serves him right, the niggardly——” something or other—we did not catch the epithet. This observation the sententious gentleman of the party prefaced by drawing his pipe and spitting in the fire. He was slightly known to Melethor—a rambling young fop of a farmer from the Caithness coast, Cromarty by name, who came a good deal about Kirkwal.

The fourth of the group he looked upon as a real curiosity. This was Ludowick Shurlson, the new laird of Brok, a strange fellow, half savage, half dandy, who claimed to be descended from the celebrated Icelandic poet Snorri Sturlson. Ludowick's inordinate personal vanity alone was sufficient to have made him what is called a character; but while it was impossible to help laughing at him, he yet commanded

a certain degree of respect, there were so many good points in the glittering corruscation. He was sentimental (in virtue of his descent, perhaps), and, unless when he had company, spent the greater part of his time in writing unintelligible verses. He aspired, however, to society, and his ruling foible was personal beauty. Originally not bad-looking, his face was terribly marked by the small-pox ; but this affliction, according to Ludowick's own statement, was derived from an eruption of the great Geyser while he was too intently gazing into the crater, or pot, on the occasion of his first visit to the land of his famed ancestor. A poetic and ingenious fiction, which argued some knowledge of the women, and to some extent it answered the purpose. Among the maidens of Thule there were not wanting those who could distinguish between a scald



from the great Geyser and the common scars of the small-pox, that hereditary scourge of their own charms.

As the cup circulated, the voices of the carousing party waxed louder, and we were enabled, notwithstanding the elemental roar and the rain beating on our backs, to make out the following bit of dialogue: "Confound them!" said Melethor, "but the old story, a listener need never expect to hear a good tale of himself." The chief speakers were Mr. Fred Shore and this same Ludowick of Brok.

"But I say, Ludowick, if you have any intention of making it up with my friend Melethor—and if you don't think my mediation sufficient—here's Cults, just the very man to manage it for you. Aren't you, Whilem?"

"I thank you, my manny," replied Ludowick, "but I don't want you, and I

don't want Whilem neither to go to the laird of Hallow, so long as I can stump on my feet if I choose—which I don't choose."

Mr. Fred: "Oh, well, bother! I know what you mean; but let us be serious. You know well enough, Ludowick, you want to get into society, and as things at present stand, you can't. There's our own house, for instance. I know you're huffed at my not taking you there, but how *can* I, with any sort of grace, and you on such terms with Melethor?"

(I afterwards asked him to what this referred. "Oh, you must know," he replied, "that this Mr. Shurlson made his money by fish-curing, and I was accused of saying that he must have had marvellous luck in curing his fish, to be able to buy Brok at thirty-five. I never made any such speech,

but I got the blame of it, and that was enough.")

"And you," said Mr. Fred, "on such terms with Melethor."

"That's all pup-pup," said Ludowick ; "if you mean by *him* your sister, you'll never come it. All demd yowl, I was told. I know all about it."

"What do you mean by yowl?" demanded Mr. Fred, lip and eye slightly quivering.

"Yowl's gud English," answered Ludowick.

English or not, the meaning was plain enough. Cromarty and Cults exchanged a laugh.

"Laugh away, gentlemen," said Mr. Fred ; "your laughing will never alter the fact : I appeal to Cults. Cults ! you know that the laird's engaged to my sister ?"

"They say sae," replied Cults, drily.

"Oh, come. You know a deuced deal more than that, Cults, if you like to speak out."

"Well," said Cults, "amang friends, I fancy there's nae harm in speaking out a wee bit. One day last summer, as I was cutting hay in the 'Town's meadows,' there cam a gaily-dressed party daikerin out from the town—with nothing to do but to enjoy themselves, but in that they didna somehow succeed—and I gat it in a great secret from Miss Rachel hersel'."

The laugh occasioned by this blunt disclosure was extremely disgusting to the finer feelings of Mr. Fred, who was a transcendental dandy, exceedingly strict and correct in his notions of propriety; and to Cults, who had a distended and most suspicious appearance of joining silently in the laugh himself, he said, with a won-

derful cold dignity for so young a lad, "Hadn't you better, Cults, be fetching another pan of water from the spring? the toddy's getting low:" and, there being no counter motion, the steward went to the well for more water.

In his absence, the party relapsed into silence: Mr. Fred, charging his pipe, began to smoke. The rain, all the while, was so beating upon our backs outside that we were on the point of relinquishing our post of observation, when the mention of his brother Weatherby's name caught our host by the ear. It was introduced by the loquacious little dandy, Shore.

"Did any of you see Weatherby this morning? He was to have joined us."

"You are nearer it there," growled Ludowick; "he's the marrying one; Baby's the marrying one; Baby's the boy! I hear gud accounts of him—not like your other

prideful sprouts—he is going to marry a lass off the land like a man—*ok*, her name is Jennie Henderland, *ok*, I say it!” Ludowick’s discourse, when he was excited, bore other unknown words or sounds besides the Icelandic conjunction.

“ Oh, oh, oh !” Mr. Fred scouted the very idea of believing such a *mésalliance* possible. “ A daughter of old James Henderland’s !—decent old James. I know him very well. That’s too bad, positively too bad, my dear fellow ; if anybody told you that, they have been hoaxing you.”

“ Hocus !” retorted Ludowick, fiercely. “ I say you are a little chap, and such words is not safe. I say that this is a marriage, which the other is not. I say the lass would be as good as him if she was not so much better. I say, moreover, what a little chap like you should not

know, but I'll tell you, she's wi' babby to him."

"What's that?" said Cults, reappearing with his dripping pitcher from the well, bent as a satyr just crept out of the rock, attracted by the smoky flare of the fire: the water drop from the pitcher fell hissing on the burning wood. "*What's that?*" said Cults. And Ludowick, his wrath appeased by this remembrancer of the inclement weather outside, answered, "Nothing, Whilem, nothing; boil us some more toddy."

Resuming our walk, Melethor confessed himself, on the whole, not much edified with the conversation in the toddy nest. He was exasperated at the confident assertions of the puppy Shore, and vowed to twist his neck the first time he met him. Laird Ludowick, he said, was an ass, of

whom he was disposed to think better ; what he had said about Raby was obviously a rhetorical flourish or figure of speech, for the purpose of putting down the little jackanapes Shore. Leaving the beach, we were glad at last to get into a somewhat more sheltered region, and just as you enter the Abbeyhall grounds we came upon his friend Rollockson, struggling and buffet-
ing his way against the blast.

CHAPTER XII.

ROBERT BELFEUR OF ABBEYHALL REMINDS HIS YOUNG FRIEND
THAT A SIMILAR ADVENTURE OCCURRED IN HIS FATHER'S
TIME.

“JIM, or the Flower of Princes-street,” as the boys sometimes called Rollockson in frolic, not a robust man, had a sort of habilimental weakness—he was rather dandified in the matter of top-coats, and never by any chance wore the rough wrapper that the climate required. He certainly looked a dismal object in his Princes-

street paletot. It was literally glazed with the rain.

He shook hands, with that kind of laugh in distress, or spasmodic convulsion of the diaphragm, to which he was so subject : there was evidently something else, some little personal adventure the matter, besides his wetting, and Melethor asked him what it was.

“ Oh, well, God bless me ! You see,” he replied, “ after moping in the house half the day, I couldn’t think of sitting down to dinner without a brush of a walk, and the truth is, I have met with an accident. I was getting on capitally until that last cursed squall attacked me in bucketfuls and shivered my umbrella to pieces ; the umbrella was Belfeur’s *own*, and what I am to say to him Heaven only knows. You know his pompous predilection for everything that’s his own ; he’ll be as mad as

Dogberry. In short, I foresee the certainty of a spoiled evening added to a scandalous day. Had I but preserved the shank or any part of it !” (Another peal of distress.) “He will be absolutely furious when he hears it was shivered to pieces out of my hand and blown over Whirrel-butts Hill. He may not say much before you, but so much the worse, I’ll get it all the brisker *bottled*—hem !”

Abbeyhall, the residence of Robert Belfeur, Esq., is one of the finest country seats in Orkney. The situation is sheltered, on the banks of the Whirrel, not far from where it falls into the sea. The terrace, extensive gardens, and rising bank of larch, promising in a few years to shelter the house on its most exposed side, show how much may be done by cultivation to compensate for the stinted hand of nature.

In the more sheltered grounds near the

house, Bollockson said, on the other subject referred to in his note, "His anxiety to see you is more than the mere senile wish for a reconciliation. There certainly is something—something in which that Miss Morland would appear to be implicated. To-day (since I wrote) he put a number of shy, sifting questions respecting her, which I must own did not appear to redound to her credit."

Melethor, quickly: "Ay, indeed ! in what respect ?"

"Well, that I cannot say ; but had he been making inquiry after an adventuress who had some special ends of her own in train, he could not have looked more severe, or talked more ambiguously."

Melethor was silent, looking savage enough. In a little time he said : "The devil's in the old ass, he has never seen her ! What can he know of her ?" Then

the lairdly brow grew very dark indeed, and he said to himself, "If, after all, she should be such a character?"

The first object that greeted them, on entering the house, was the master of the mansion, a tall, elderly man, who had just that moment come down stairs from making his toilet for dinner. His scanty silver hair was combed and brushed into a nice toupet, and from that downward, to the tips of his shining boots, he was dressed with a care that, truth to say, bordered on the ludicrous, considering the remote situation, the dismal day, and the very limited company he had to sit down with him.

On the subject of the missing umbrella there was no open explosion, and, so far, Mr. Rollockson had not overrated the restraining presence of his friend; but, oh, the flush! the undined insurrection of the blood, if I may so express it, that mantled

in the parchment cheek of their host, Mr. Belfeur. Full as he was of the direst suspicions, a dry allusion to the subject was the utmost the old gentleman allowed himself.

“ You have been calling somewhere, I perceive, Rollockson,” said he ; “ you have left the umbrella behind you. Just as I anticipated.”

James (or Jim) Rollockson was an excellent and upright fellow as lived, but he had one fault, a sad off-putting weakness—he never could face the little difficulties and scrapes of life at the proper time, and thus, for present comfort's sake, regardless of his legacy duty to the old gentleman (to use a poor pun that Rollockson himself would have thought good—the Abbey-hall Belfeurs had no children), he allowed him to remain in his self-imposed error, if he did not even add something like

positive falsehood. "Yes, he had called at——" indistinctly mentioning some place in the neighbourhood.

"*Where?*" said Mr. Belfeur. He was not in the least deaf, but it was one of his nice peculiarities of temper to fancy that people might suspect him.

"Wh-r-l-butts," replied R., naming with difficulty the place of his imaginary call—"Whirrel-butts;" whereas the umbrella was blown over the hill of that name.

Melethor suppressed a strong desire to laugh outright: graver feelings were awakened by the visit. Belfeur and his father were contemporaries by a difference of not more than seven years; his father, had he been alive, would have been seventy-two past; Mr. Belfeur was, therefore, in his sixty-sixth year. They had been friends in early youth, and up to middle age, when one of those trifling misunderstandings

that will happen to the best of country gentlemen, separated them, never again to meet on this side time. They had no ill will to each other, could they have overcome the natural indolence and reluctance to meet again *no longer young*; there was nothing else to keep them apart; and when death took old Hallow, and his settlements came to be read, the name of Robert Belfeur of Abbeyhall stood at the head of the quorum of trustees. Melethor's own personal acquaintance with him was very little; he remembered him coming about the house when he was a boy; and, as far as it went, he wove it very neatly into his reintroduction.

Mr. Belfeur bowed to the speech of the young man, mightily pleased within himself at its coming off (on his part) in full dress.

"Certainly, my dear sir," he said, "I

am very happy to see you at my house. Your father and I quarrelled about—upon my word I hardly remember what it was—a foolish loss of temper. Ah, young men! take a bit of advice. Had I the world to begin again, I should not be nearly so much disposed to stand out upon every little trifle; they are gratifying at the moment, but needles and pins when one comes to my time of life.” But here, as if it had just occurred to him that he was admitting a little too much, Mr. Belfeur’s cheek flushed once more, and, with a somewhat frigid gaze at R., he hastily concluded his speech by reversing the point of the moral. “Well, well, there’s comfort, too, when one is too old to mend; but, if punctuality were more generally studied than it is, I am persuaded the amount of regret in the world would be very greatly diminished.”

My friend Robert Asher of Anthills once said to me, on a particular occasion, when I had the good fortune to arrive at precisely the same moment as himself, "The fact is, sir, that punctuality is the father of fortune, and the mother of all the virtues." The laird of Abbeyhall could not say the striking things that Mr. Asher did, but he had the same high opinion of punctuality.

A footboy glided into the hall, and rang a large hand-bell.

"Dinner, gentlemen," said Mr. Belfeur. "Really, Mr. Rollockson, what have you been standing there for all this time, when you know the way to your room? Do make haste, and put off these abominable wet clothes for others. You must be damp too, Mr. Deerness; we have no ladies to-day, so you'll not object, I hope, to such

an antiquated change as I have to offer you."

"Not the least," said Melethor, "were it necessary; but see (throwing off his sea-jacket), I am quite dry and presentable—that is, if my morning costume——"

"You will do very well. But you would like to wash your hands." And, resolved on carrying that dainty point, at least, the old gentleman led the way up-stairs to his own room.

"There is only," he observed, "Mrs. Belfeur and ourselves, and we must wait for Rollockson, at any rate. Rollockson is the most stupid, obstinate ass getting that ever I knew. Could there be anything more inconceivably absurd than that great-coat he wears at this season of the year? Great coat! it is more like a prize thing at a sale of Bedlam fancy-work—he looks perfectly crazy in it!

And to go out in such weather, with only the precarious protection of an umbrella ! I have known a man forget to bring back an umbrella when the day happened to turn out fine ; but it was reserved to Rollockson to show, that the worse the day, and the greater, one would think, the impossibility of forgetting—it was reserved, I say, to Rollockson to show that the deplorable feat can be done. The listless habit is growing upon him. I notice a difference since this time last year. Did you ever hear it said that Rollockson had—hem—ever met with a disappointment, or rejection, or anything of that sort ?”

“Never,” said Melethor ; “never anything serious. I have heard him quizzed on the subject, as people quiz bachelors of his age.”

“Then, sir,” rejoined Mr. Belfeur, solemnly, “mark my words, he is becom-

ing melancholy ; his frothy spirits are exhausted, and he is becoming melancholy."

The Belfeurs, as we said, had no family : they were just themselves two. Mrs. B. was a quiet, lady-like body, with a Calvinised look of primitive simplicity about her, and nothing in her—the very model, Markus Skeldar said, of a Dissenting clergyman's wife—of course everything is tittle-tattled and turned over again in Orkney—a boorish comparison, Robert Belfeur said, he never would or could forgive.

Despite his host's forebodings, despite the lost umbrella, Rollockson was in excellent spirits at dinner. How was it possible to be otherwise, drinking sherry at 100s. a dozen ? Mr. Belfeur, as he sipped, scrutinised him narrowly over his glass, thinking it was all assumed, but looked, after a round or two, as if he

would have to give up his "melancholy" hypothesis altogether.

Mrs. Belfeur was not an early riser after dinner—she liked to hear the talk and the news ; but at a hint from her lord, she retired at the time usually allotted to ladies, and the gentlemen were left to themselves. After a glass to his better-half, and a pause to collect his thoughts, Mr. Belfeur then introduced the subject.

The preface I omit. He said :

"I may speak, I presume, before Rollockson ; he is your agent. You know, of course, John Beal, writer in town ?"

"Perfectly," said Melethor. "He is a gentleman well known."

"Well, sir," proceeded Mr. Belfeur, "the gentleman called on me yesterday—or was it the day before ? Yes, it was the day before—with a deed or disposition, purporting to be by your late father, the

effect of which, if I rightly understood Beal, is to make over to your brother, Mr. Weatherby, a large and important part of the Hallow property."

"I know—I am aware," said Melethor, "that such a thing is alleged. In a matter of this nature, I need not say, Mr. Belfeur, that I am most anxious to avoid publicity as much as possible."

Mr. Belfeur concurred with his young friend there. "Certainly, sir; the secret is as safe with me as with my late friend in his grave. Have you——?" The old gentleman flushed, and hesitated to put the question, and the other saved him the trouble.

"Yes, sir—among friends, Mr. Belfeur—I may say, distinctly say, that I have great doubts of the genuineness of that title; or, at all events, of the means by which it was obtained."

Mr. Belfeur observed: "When it was presented to me by Beal I certainly must say I thought such a document—a post-humous draft in favour of your brother Raby to so very serious an amount—was open to very grave suspicions."

Rollockson: "Did Beal say what his object was in showing you the title?"

"I don't think he did. He certainly made no direct statement on that head. I was, in fact, so completely taken by surprise, that I could not, at first, command attention to the *ipsissima verba* of our conversation, and it would be wrong not to own that, in staring at the man, I may have lost some of the introductory portion of what he said. But, in general, I have a strong impression that he did not know very well himself what his object was, or that he was afraid to say. He seemed to refer a good deal to the fact that by the

general deed of settlement I was one of the late Mr. Deerness's trustees."

Rollockson, with professional animation: "Just so! he wanted to see how it would take, and he did you the honour to select you as the representative of public opinion and the landed interest."

Mr. Belfeur: "I don't exactly see, Rollockson, that *that* could be his object: he could hardly expect that I should be other than very much surprised on having such a paper presented to me."

"Oh, of course, of course," said R., "but for mere surprise he would not care—Capernairn can stand any amount of that; what he wanted was to see whether he could detect any suspicion in your face."

Now, the notion of the notorious Loki (as the common people called him) coming to Mr. Belfeur of Abbeyhall for the deliberate purpose of prying into his face, was,

to say the least of it, a bold hypothesis: either *that*—or the wine—had an instant and most manifest effect on the old gentleman's complexion.

“If,” he remarked, with considerable emphasis—“if there is anything in that conjecture of yours, Rollockson—if the man actually fancied my face was so very easy to read, he was taking an impertinent liberty, for which he has paid the penalty by being taken in his own trap. Sir, I had suspicion, very great suspicion, but he saw none in my face.”

The W. S. bowed and drank his wine.

“And you expressed none?” he added, after a little pause.

Mr. Belfeur, with ears much inflamed: “Really, Rollockson, what do you take me for?” but not finding words to express himself adequately, he passed on to the next branch of the subject.

“But, sir, Mr. Deerness, this is not the most extraordinary part of it. There is a young lady, a guest with you at present——”

“Miss Morland. Yes.”

“Are you aware that she has taken the winding of this pirn, if I may so express it, into her own hands? How she came to know that such a division of the property was contemplated, or that such a deed existed, Beal is not aware, but he conjectures that she might have learned it from your father himself, having been much about him in his latter days. But be that matter as it may, what use does this enterprising young lady propose to make of her knowledge? Why, first, she tries to make a catch of your brother, but not succeeding, she is now trying what a little intimidation can do, and, in conjunction with some other party unknown, is

supposed to be ready (should Raby not come to terms) with an artfully concocted story to cast a foul suspicion on his claims; the motive, as Beal supposes, not revenge—for she is not of that disposition, being soft, plausible, and self-seeking—but, by way of *dernier ressort*, by this seeming zeal for the integrity of the property, to create an interest with yourself! This is the peculiar feature in the story which has perplexed me so much. I certainly have no great faith in John Beal; but that he should thus openly challenge investigation is what one would hardly have expected—there is undoubtedly something singular about it.”

And all three drank their wine in a brooding manner that argued ill for our poor Effie.

“I should be the last man, at my time



of life," said Mr. Belfeur, "to be uncharitable, or, if you will, unchivalrous, to the sex, but I suspect the fact cannot be doubted that there are such adventuresses who creep into families. A person of a similar description, you may remember, occurred in your father's time."

Robert Belfeur was as nearly immaculate as it is possible for a man to be who has nothing else to do but to take a pride in himself, to look after his morals and his entire walk and conversation, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. But the very best of country gentlemen, living so much in retirement as Mr. Belfeur, will have a little malicious appetite for a story. Personally, he knew nothing of Effie whatever; she was a mere abstraction representative of a peculiar form of social evil, which the old gentleman's family pride

held in the greatest dread and abhorrence. Rollockson's interest in the matter was almost entirely professional. And Melethor? His first impulse (as when Rollockson mentioned the thing in the grounds) was to treat the whole legend with scorn and indignation; but the man was mortal, and a laird—threatened with a serious mutilation of his property; and many little indicia in Effie's manners and ways, unnoticed at the moment they were passing, now rushed upon his recollection, as if to corroborate the story.

In his brief way, he came at once to the point.

“Mr. Belfeur,” he said, “if you please, we will discuss this matter no further. The girl is with me in ‘double trust’—as a young lady, a stranger, and as my guest. Gentlemen both, I beg you to suspend

judgment so far as the matter relates to her. For the rest, I am too angry and vexed to talk; it is idle speculating until we get more accurately at the facts."

The truth is, one prefers the more solid and prosing topics of life when drinking such wine as Belfeur's; and it was surprising in how short a time they got into train, as if nothing unpleasant had preceded. At the first bell for tea, their host said: "And now, gentlemen both, excuse me for a quarter of an hour; age has its privileges, Mr. Deerness; I am going to take my nap."

So saying, the old gentleman disposed his chair on the hearth, held up his pocket-handkerchief (a large India silk) delicately before the fire a moment or two to air it, and then dropped it over the venerable white head.

The young men continued their wine and their talk, but speaking low, so as not to disturb the rosy slumber that was stealing down on their host.

“All this,” said the Writer to the Signet — “this round-about way of Beal’s going to work, convinces me more and more there’s something wrong.”

“You mean,” said Melethor, “his plan for destroying beforehand the credibility of Effie Morland, in case she should happen to know more of the matter than she should.”

Rollockson : “Not exactly. I refer simply to the existence of a title.”

“What would you advise?”

“An immediate precognition of their witnesses.”

“Who are they?”

“The brothers Gemmel of Fair Isle.

B. looked into that corner—one of the hypothetical cases he put to me let out so much—he's longer-headed than he sometimes gets credit for. They're decent traders, the Gemmels, I suppose?"

"Yes. But who is to conduct the precognition? I take it, you have no fancy to go the voyage yourself?"

Mr. Rollockson said it was not necessary he should go himself. He could find a proxy. "My clerk, Davie Athens, came up with me in the steamer on a visit to his cousins in Stromness, where he now is."

"The tall, stupid-looking man," said Melethor, "I once or twice met in your rooms at whist?"

"The very same. I pledge myself for his secrecy. The fact is, Athens is a dull man, though not in your sense of stupid; it is not only not in his nature, I abso-

lutely believe it is not in his power, to let out a secret, however many he may have officially taken in; once there they are safe: Davie is a dungeon that never opens."

But nothing definite was concluded. Melethor said that he had great, very great objections, to take any initiatory steps on the assumption that the title was a fraud, or had been fraudulently obtained; and, at the second bell for tea, their host awoke from his nap.

Belfeur, an abstemious man in the main, was a neat, stiffish drinker when he had occasion to play the grand host. After tea, and a hand at whist, they had supper, and some more of the—I forget the vintage—and, in short, it was considerably past eleven o'clock when they left Abbeyhall to walk into Kirkwal. He offered to send

the carriage with them, but as the gale had by this time fallen, and the night was now comparatively fine, the young men said they would much prefer to walk.

"Good night, old boy!" said Rollockson.

"Really, Mr. Rollockson—but it is no use speaking to you—your levity is perfectly incorrigible; but mark my words, sir—after too much sunshine there comes a cloud—and this sort of thing is growing upon you."

"Well, Mr. Deerness," said the "old boy," "if you must go, I will no longer insist; ah! I remember the day myself when a walk home was worth all the carriages in the world!"

He saw them out as far as the terrace, where, pointing to our Lady the moon, now high and visible in the brooding clouds,

he again congratulated them on their youthful legs and the long walk before them, appending to his good night a private whisper to Melethor, who was the principal recipient of his adieus. "Give your arm to Rollockson, and take care crossing the Whirrel-burn."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHALLENGE.

“THE last duel in Orkney” (as it is still jocularly held in remembrance), although it never appeared in the newspapers, and is consequently believed by many to have been of a purely mythical character, did actually take place, but in circumstances which, though sufficiently serious in the main, being accompanied by some little ridicule, rendered it desirable for all parties

concerned to bury the affair as much as possible in oblivion.

There cannot be a doubt that both gentlemen had taken too much wine at Belfeur's. Scarcely had they left the hospitable mansion of Abbeyhall (arm in arm, by the way), when the Writer to the Signet again brought forward his views on the precognition question, not so much, as it appeared to the other, from any real professional conviction of the necessity of the step, as for the sake of the trip to his clerk Davie Athens; and out of this arose one of those little quarrels which it is painful to have to record.

"Not to be thought of, my dear fellow," said Melethor. "I'll none of Davie!"

Now James Rollockson, though a personal friend, was also their family lawyer, and it was with some heat that he replied, "You must be d—k to say so."

The other retorted, "I don't know whether I am or not, James; but you are, very."

"Oh, ah! am I? to-morrow morning be the judge. In the mean time, by your leave or without it, just as you like, I'll just draw you up a little bill of the consequences. You're wrong, Melethor; I tell you, you are wrong! wrong! wrong! and perhaps you'll repent it when you see the land licked up. I never knew much good come yet of despising 'fessional advice. I give you advice now to avert futur' consequences. That is just the *nunc pro tunc* of it: the right p-r-o-fessional thing, and you never can go far wrong in following that."

"I'll follow my nose," said the laird.

"You will!" cries the lawyer; "then, sir, I fortel the day when you will follow it like a certain animal in this and Paddy-

land going to market—that's to say, with the said feature very considerably nearer the ground—he, hem."

This is all amusing enough and fair game, but what followed I must take the liberty to suppress: it will be enough to say that the gallant W. S., coming eventually by the worst of it, was so exasperated (or so drunk) as to give his friend a challenge on the spot.

This, while it highly tickled, at the same time appeared to sober the other a little.

"Nonsense, James," he said; "you know I am no fighter, and, for that matter, neither are you."

"I don't know that," said James Rollockson. "I don't refer to present personalities. I refer to the growing disposition (yourself and Belfeur included) to treat me as if I were no better than an ass."

Melethor, who being much the stronger

was much the soberer of the two, at once disavowed the imputation of participating in sentiments so disloyal to friendship, and affectionately entreated his friend to believe that in this chimerical notion he was speaking under the *hysterica passio* of drink. But there is an old saying, mocking's catching; it was fated that before sleeping that night he should encounter another member of the legal profession of a somewhat different calibre from his friend Rollockson.

Just as the little outcast was cemented, they came to Whirrel-burn ford, about the crossing of which Mr. Belfeur had given Melethor a warning hint. I am told that a subscription has recently been got up to build a bridge. Pausing on the brow of the descent, below them lay the ford spread out and glittering in the moonlight.

"Listen," said Rollockson. "I don't

like the sound of the Whirrel to-night—do you hear the rush it's making round the corner : it must be very much swollen. I wish we had risen before that last b-t-le, or stayed still where we were."

"I see the stepping-stones," said Melethor.

"Why yes, God bless me, so do I! but it's only the tops of them—they look," said R., "as bobbing and precarious as a string of pot-lids!" And both laughed at a comparison which certainly gave a true description of the state of the ford; the stepping-stones were above water, and that was all.

"Bah! let the worst come to the worst, we can wade it," said Melethor; and they descended to the margin of the stream. It was then that he observed a man standing at gaze on the opposite side. He was about to hail the belated wight, appa-

rently in the same predicament as themselves, when the W. S., fuddled as he was, showed the use of a professional eye. "Hush!" said he; "if that's not John Beal, it's something very like him."

The Abbeyhall guests made a startled pause. It certainly was Jan standing looking at the moon, his harsh features, which had at all times a sorrowful expression, rendered trebly striking thus exhibited at such an hour.

It will of course be understood from the context that this Mr. Beal—Loki, as the common people called him, after the ancient Scandinavian patron of the lawyers—was in but so-so odour with the gentlemen of Orkney; yet he was far from being a common pettifogger, whose ill name was only commensurate with his deserts. Beal was not a native of the soil: at the date in question, he had been

a settler of some twenty years' standing, and about three or four proprietor of the small estate of Cappernairn, the purchase of his hard-earned, and, on the whole, unimpeachable savings. The prejudice against him was, in fact, very peculiar, but it would require the extent of an essay almost to exhibit its growth; enough to say here, that in its maturity it was none the less strong for having been originally groundless. The result was, that Beal became a solitary, morose humorist, with no society, and without a single friend in the world. He had a special and most dear regard to our laird Melethor, partly, it was said, in consequence of his putting his father past him (old Mr. Deerness having been one of the exceptional few among the large proprietors who employed Beal), and partly, as the story goes, there was a lady in the case, to whom Mr. Beal was

paying his addresses, with a fair chance of success, when his Mastership of Hallow, then a boy of fifteen, came, it was said, whipper-snapper in, and caused the lady to change her mind. There was no truth in the story whatever; but Jan lost the lady, and it required very little to make him believe it.

Whether, as some have supposed, Mr. Beal was out looking for our friends on purpose, is immaterial: it seems more probable that the recluse, taking his night walk as far as the ford, and hearing their voices, elevated by wine, at a considerable distance, was prompted by his morose feelings to give them the meeting. The Abbeyhall guests, we said, had made a startled pause when they perceived who the gentleman on the other side was.

The reader will now be pleased to suppose them across the ford, without our

enumerating the number of narrow escapes Mr. Rollockson made of embracing the moon's chaste image reflected in the gurgling brook. The truth of that matter is, that Melethor, wading himself, led his friend across by the hand; old memories, old associations were called up, by the fact that John Beal, his father's once trusted man of business, was standing looking on, and at such a moment, M. was most anxious that nothing ludicrous should happen to his successor.

"You are late abroad to-night, Mr. Beal," said Melethor.

"A little," he replied, in a tone of indifference. "You are late yourselves, gentlemen."

"We have been at Abbeyhall. So it seems, Mr. Beal, this celebrated Bletherentlet title has cast up at last?"

Beal returned a brief affirmative. "But I was not aware," said he, "of its celebrity."

"Oh!" said Melethor, "I spoke by anticipation. It will be celebrated before we have done with it."

"That's at your pleasure, Mr. Melethor; it's not uncommon for such things to land in litigation," said Jan.

Rollockson: "Before this goes further, allow me, Mr. Deerness; there is a professional question to be asked. What is the history of this Blether—what do you call it—title?"

"Bletherentlet; it includes the Hurlit valley," said Jan.

"Well, well," proceeded Mr. Rollockson; "and Hurlit valley—what's the history?"

"Not to-night," said John Beal, in a tone that seemed to indicate a slight

smile. "I intend walking a little farther yet; it was your voices coming down the road that stopped me. You had better call on me to-morrow morning. No one who knows him can doubt Mr. Rollockson's professional capacity; but there's an old proverb that says, "It's ill speaking between a fou man and a fasting."

"You are an uncivil fellow to say so!" cried the indignant Writer to the Signet. "I appeal to the court—to the, the—the present moment—I am ready to go into the case."

But from the pendulous state of vibration of his learned friend on his right arm, Melethor thought it would be just as prudent not to let him proceed with the case at present. Could he have shown the same forbearance in his own wrath! But, as the old commentators used to say, what

was to be, was to be. He put a few questions himself.

“As the story goes, sir, this same so-called title was accidentally found by Mr. Macabodo; him you dispossessed, but denied the fact when we called on you; and now it appears you have it after all.”

“I told you,” said Jan, “that I would very soon sort Mr. Macabodo.”

“Mr. Macabodo, sir, is a gentleman.”

“Oh yes—he’s a gentleman, as you say—I know him very well.”

“And you have slandered an innocent girl.”

“Ay! did old Smelfungus tell you that? Well, you’ll know Miss Effie Morland better by and by, too!”

The report that Melethor here struck him is not true; in the blaze of the mo-

ment he certainly did call him an ugly name and the title a forgery — the real apprehension being that it was but too valid.

“Take care what you say, Mr. Melethor,” said John Beal. “Let me beg of you, for old acquaintance’ sake, to have some consideration. You have just gone a little too far. Don’t allow your gentry prejudices to carry you away altogether. I beg you to observe that this exquisite fiction of clubbing your heads together (and all that’s in them!) to ignore me does not in the very smallest degree affect my status as a gentleman. You will be good enough to withdraw that expression. Do you withdraw?”

“Withdraw! you blinded slave to your own spiteful, pettifogging passions,” cried M. “I repeat”—this is shocking lan-

guage, but it must be remembered he was threatened with the loss of half his estate, and, as he believed, through this man's machinations—"had you possessed a tithe of sense to your ability, you would have packed up your fortunes years ago, and left a country that rejected you, like a man, instead of remaining to be a curse to yourself and to it."

"That is very true," observed John Beal; and the speech was highly characteristic of the man, as if a touch of truth illustrative of his unhappy social position were, under any circumstances, welcome. "That would have been the better course; but, like most reminders, it comes a little too late. However, sir, it has done the business—you have sobered our friend Rollockson!" In terms of guarded but bitter reproach Beal went on to say: "I

remember you well, Mr. Deerness, at a time when you could know little or nothing of me but the mere outside coming about the house ; and, speaking generally, I could have wished that this had come through any other than your father's son. In other respects most welcome. You have been running up a long account with me among you, and I could not wish a better paymaster than Mr. Melethor Deerness. It only remains for me to say that, whatever may be the intermediate result of this meeting, the Bletherentlet title—forgery as you call it—will be heard of at the ensuing dinner on the seventeenth. You are fond, you hereditary big folks, of being tried by your peers, and by God you shall have it !”

He touched his hat slightly and disappeared across the ford, leaving our friends to pursue their way home in considerable

dubiety about the sum total, or the "what it all comes to," of the meeting. "I can't very well make it out," said the one. "Nor I," said the other. In truth, the little remaining conversation they had was not very connected, consisting of such scraps as the following :

M. : "Poor beggar ! where can he be creeping to at this time of night ?"

W. S. : "Ha ! ha ! ha ! very, very, very ex'rordinary meeting !"

Or, again, "What the devil's the use of you, James ? You might have made me keep my tongue a little more to myself. Do you think he means to call me out ? because, if he does, it's quite true what he says about his status, and I'll have to go. Was there ever—do you happen to recollect, Rollockson, for I don't at this moment myself—was there ever a duel fought in Orkney ?"

But Mr. Rollockson's faculty of articulation was for the present suspended. His reply to the question, evidently meant to be copious, whistled in his wind-pipe like the shriek of the passing night plover.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WHITE FEATHER.

TOUCHING the proposed precognition, it may be as well to state here that Mr. Rollockson took his own way, and on his own responsibility sent out his clerk, Davie Athens, to Fair Isle, by the brig *Olive*, of Stromness, going the voyage with winter stores.

At the breakfast-table next morning they underwent the customary joking about late hours and grave looks. Rol-

lockson had his never-failing "Oh, why, God bless me, you see—the tyrannical hospitalities!" and picked away, headache and all, at what was before him. The Master said nothing. It was remarked, however, both by Mr. Jerrold and Mr. Grouse, that he sometimes looked very hard at Effie with a sort of dissatisfied expression that puzzled the lads. Jerrold in his heart said, "Mamma has been down upon him there;" and Grouse, Effie's devoted little friend, said in his, "If he has changed his mind since yesterday, the Abbeyhall claret man be rank puzhon, and I pity his taste!"

Mr. Rollockson, having business in Stromness (Davie to send off), left immediately after breakfast.

Half an hour after he left, or barely so much, James Rollockson burst into the

back parlour, where his friend Melethor was writing letters, with such a face of dismay as he could hardly have exceeded had he just met some Eastern performer with the scimitar in the street, and had his head whipped off and clapped on again. He seemed literally almost beside himself. Fixing a ghastly stare on his friend, he first ejaculated,

“God bless me!” and then, “I suppose you know what has brought me back?”

“A challenge from Beal, I suppose,” said Mr. Deerness, laying down the pen, and reclining back in his chair. His coolness, or apparent coolness, only increased the agitation of the worthy Writer to the Signet.

“God bless me, yes! What’s to be done?” Receiving no immediate reply, he repeated the question, bringing it at the

same time more home : "What's to be done, Melethor ? Your mother and sister, to say nothing of yourself !"

"Let me hear the particulars, first," said Melethor ; "who's his friend ?"

"Captain Coaster, of the Guard."

"Indeed ! Faith, James, this looks a little serious ; they say Coaster's worth fifteen or twenty thousand pounds."

I don't know whether this stroke of snobbery was intended, or whether it was the natural expression of the moment.


"And where," he asked, "is the captain ?"

"At the inn, waiting for our answer. He said he would wait half an hour."

"I must see him," said Melethor. "Will you go with me ?"

"You'll make nothing of him," said R., despondingly ; "the man's an ass."

They walked over to the hotel, and had



an interview with Mr. Coaster. The captain made them a wonderful bow—too wonderful to declare for peace; the captain's bow declared for war.

Coaster was worth all that was said, every shilling; one of those absurd caricatures of Fortune that the capricious dame takes such a delight at times to exhibit in her front shop window for the delectation and amusement of the young people; the man, in short, though an ass, was in good society, and bore a perfectly respectable character. It drove Melethor out of all patience to see him so perfectly serious in this absurd affair.

“Is this a joke, captain, or what?” said he.

“A joke!” cries the captain; “that’s as you take it, sir. *I* should say it was no joke.”

“Then excuse me for taking the liberty

of saying so, Captain Coaster, this is a very ridiculous message you have brought to me from your friend Mr. Beal."

Captain, interrupting: "No friend of mine—that's to say, no friend in particular."

"Well," said Melethor, "so much the more anomalous your present appearance —'in character,' as they say of the funny man on the stage."

"Sir!" cries Coaster, taking in another button of his coat.

Whether it was, as Shandy says, the temptation of false wit, or temper, or excitement, or a positive mistake of the judgment, certain it is Melethor did not show his usual knowledge of human nature in thus joking with the captain. And that again followed by such a sharp speech as the following:

"You don't mean to tell me, Captain



Coaster, that you look upon this in any other light than as the most absolute farce? The man was formerly some time agent to my father, and the little quarrel that arose between us last night, referred to an out-of-the-way business transaction, in the discussion of which words ran high on both sides, and nothing, as Mr. Rollockson here says, occurred to warrant the pretence that you have come about."

"Elethor Deerness," replied

"I have not the honour of

your acquaintance, neither have I

any particular to speak of

concerning you for the last seven years a-

part, and Byle, I am

glad to hear of you, Mr. Byle

is a man of a mortal

confidence in high words

and a great deal of posteroseness

about him, sir, we

have your opinion for ~~that~~. I only know that here is a poor man that has been held down for the last twenty years. I have delivered my friend Mr. Byle's message, and I wait your answer. ~~Winn~~. I don't presume to express any opinion. At the same time, gentlemen, I will not pretend to misunderstand your method of boxing the compass; and if upon the whole you prefer to tip Byle the white feather, you have only to pass the word aft, and I'll in my endeavour to convey the same."

"Keep the white feather for your own ~~retaining~~, captain," said Melethor; "it has proved in the service before now, if all ~~can~~ be true. Tell Mr. Byle that I will meet him to-morrow morning, when and where you will. To-day I am engaged with ~~some~~ friends. Good morning."

"Captain Coaster," said poor Rollock-

son, catching at the sinking straw of peace ; but the captain was far out of hearing. The captain waved high his indignant glove, and withdrew to revise his line of battle, and prepare for the morrow.

Melethor spoke of him with unrestrained bitterness of soul. " A fine scrape that ass has brought me into ; had he been but principal instead of second, I should have looked forward with some satisfaction to having a crack at *him*."

His mother was expecting the Belfeurs and some friends of theirs, English people, who were staying with the Priory folks ; and so friend James and he returned home thoughtfully, the lawyer arguing that, on his mother's account, he ought to decline the meeting at all hazards, let people say what they would. He replied that he thought differently—not that he was so

very much afraid of what people would say ;
“ but my mother, James—I suspect she requires something of the sort—some check—to restore her to anything like her natural happiness and peace of mind. She is growing anxious and fretful, with a morbid craving for irritants beyond anything I ever remember to have seen in her. It is really difficult to conceive what this conformity is, or what her notions of it are like, which she would have her family, and, if possible, the whole world come to ; but one thing I can see very plainly, she is filling herself with imaginary sorrows. My father’s death came in the course of nature ; probably nothing but a smarter stroke of affliction will clear away this hypochondriacal darkness.”

Mr. Rollockson could not deny that Mrs. Deerness was an altered lady, and

that something of the sort might have a salutary effect, but he argued that affliction might be near enough at hand without its taking that particular shape—there was no necessity for that.

“You refer to Weatherby,” said the other. “I should have thought, Rollockson, this was hardly a time to recal that supposition. I have told you again and again that I had finally set my face against it; nay, more, that if you could—if damnation would so have it that you did fish up legal proof, I would be the first to crush it under my heel. You have no brother, James, and I, I suppose you think, have—*one* to spare; but that’s not the way it works either, though you may have heard me curse him at an odd time for his idleness. It’s not so long ago, man—not so many years yet—since he was my big pet

brother, who gave me my licks, and I liked and admired him the more for it; and although he is changed, and in a manner nothing to me now, keeping his own set, and following his own ways after his own cockleheaded conceit, and losing caste every day more and more with all his old friends—yourself, for example, among the rest—still, though I turn my back, I'll not let him go down if it can possibly be helped—and I still think it may be possible, without exposure, to save him from that limb of the devil, Beal. So that you see, my dear James, all things considered, it would be giving them too great an advantage over me were I to decline Beal's challenge, supported by such a fellow as Coaster—an eternal ass, who would never let the story rest."

The Writer to the Signet eyed his friend



obliquely, first on one side and then the other ; and concluding that a man so unhappily situated must be in a state of temporary derangement, it was useless, of course, to argue with him further. In the mean time, as (even taking this very extreme view which he appeared to entertain of crushing the legal proof) it was most important to get hold of the witnesses, R. resumed his purpose of setting off immediately to Stromness to give his clerk the necessary powers and instructions. Accordingly, having for form and friendship's sake ascertained that he was not to be asked to the fray, James Rollockson slipped out of the road, with a heart brooding full of anxiety on the probabilities of the morrow. Again and again, in his visions of the meeting, he saw his friend fall ; and again and again, just as often, Loki bit the dust.

As soon as he got home, the Master despatched William Cults with a note to Long-Annot to his friend Markus Skeldar. And shortly afterwards the Belfeurs and their party arrived.

CHAPTER XV.

SIGHT-SEEING—AN ALARM.

TO-DAY his mother was in unusually high spirits, but rather as if she were determined to be happy; talkative, rather than her former self. Melethor was not a superstitious fellow, or much of a believer in what's called *fey*, but at times her flights did provoke him to an involuntary shudder, considering the predicament he stood in.

Between one and two o'clock, after

having been to the cathedral, they were showing their friends Earl's Palace. There was a lady visitor inspecting some architectural ornament or date on the interior façade of the quadrangle. She appeared to be a person of distinction; she was richly dressed. On she came, nodding to the music of the wind, and featly stepping over the shadows of the clouds lying like network on the pavement, much as some earl's noble dame might have walked there three hundred years ago—but ah, good Heavens! what a shock of surprise to our parson! It was Sally Baron, the discarded favourite.

When Logan first saw her in Venture-fair she was meanly clad: her present travelling attire, that looked so imposing at a little distance, exhibited, on a nearer view, such a faded assortment of antiquated finery as incontinently brought the

tears into the reverend young fellow's eyes.
In her bonnet was a feather and plume.

It was Logan's impression that she intended to accost Mrs. Deerness, but, with a gait at once lofty and mincing, her old acquaintance passed on. The English strangers asked what odd-looking woman was that? She passed them again, and, this second time, Mrs. Deerness did not so well succeed in concealing her emotion; the strangers looked still more surprised, so did Mr. Robert Belfeur; and, in something of a panic, though they hardly knew at what, the sight-seeing party left the ruins, all with the single exception of parson Logan; him the wanderer detained. "Stay, reverend sir, I have something to say to you:" and Logan mechanically obeyed, so completely was he taken by surprise.

Our hero was thus involved in a situa-

tion which, it must be confessed, was a little trying to the clerical temper—the best of the day, too, was past, and it was coming on to rain. Fair readers (for what else could he take the woman for but a light-headed mad woman?)—fair readers, I say, will excuse him for saying, with a little peevish spurt of impatience, “What would ye, woman? Unless I can be of any real service to you, it is idle to detain me from my friends.”

The plumed lady absolutely laughed at him. It was a sensible sentiment, she observed, and she forgave it. “We are all naturally a little excited by this chance meeting to-day, Mr. Morland. Whilst your friends are enjoying themselves, be it yours, sir, to hear. I shall not detain you long, and what I have to say may be of service. The day has been when these deserted walls once inspired me with hopes

as palatial, and, it may be, as fallacious, as those you yourself are now cherishing."

"What know ye of my hopes, woman?" cried Logan.

"Nothing," replied Alicia; "I spoke in general. Your connexion with this family is not dissimilar to my own. Hear my story, and—as you appear to be an ardent young man—beware of any deep misplaced attachment, whether in friendship or in love."

"I know not," said the parson, "that I am warranted in hearing your story, bearing, as you appear to do, malice towards an honourable lady and her family."

"Malice, sir!" (a little haughtily)—"I bear no malice."

"That is easily asserted," said our friend, sturdily; "but it is difficult to make your professions square with your carriage. If you bore no malice, why give

your head such a toss when passing Mrs. Deerness ?”

“Oh !” said Alicia ; and again the poor soul laughed. “We are weak, frail, human creatures, Mr. Morland, spiteful in our best affections, in our most creditable emotions—in the great surprise I really could not help that toss ! But for that my heart must have burst, or, I must have cried out ‘Margaret !’ before so many gay strangers, and that would have caused a scene.”

Her story, as she related it, differed in no material particulars from the version already in his possession by Captain Kith. The quondam governess of the Greenlaws, after she became a widow, was invited, at the recommendation of Mr. Deerness, to come to Hallow in the capacity of nurse and companion to his young wife, who was then in delicate health. (“Send,”

said the good-natured, easy-going laird, "for Sally Baron.")

Sally Baron, quite in keeping with the disappointment and her flighty, foolish, demonstrative character, immediately struck up a romantic friendship with her successful rival: nothing odd, says the gruff English moralist, will last, and such a friendship was much too fine to wear; accordingly, in the fifth month of the third year, the bubble burst, and Madam Sally was turned away in disgrace. Such, in simple outline, was her story, though embellished in the telling with some real feeling and many fine sentiments.

"In the presence of the cabal who had plotted to ruin me, and of that vain hussy who would have raised the eyes of flirtation to her own master, but that my watchful eye detected her—such, sir, was the

reward of my vigilance—you have met with the character in history before—I was ordered to leave the house, with epithets heaped upon my head which I cannot repeat, but which will ring here while memory holds her seat. Never could unfortunate woman hope to lift her head again after such terms of reproach.”

“The terms were probably strong enough,” observed Logan; “we all know how eloquent ladies can be in certain cases; but why not hold up your head again if the reproach was undeserved?”

“Alas, sir,” replied Alicia, “I see you know nothing of friendship—nothing, at least, of woman’s friendship. Had I been at all the creature they accused me, I should probably have gone away carrying my head high enough. I merely said as we parted, ‘Margaret, the Lord will visit you for this.’”

Settled, grave, and matronly situations she had held since, both in private families and public institutions, but finding herself beginning to age, the wandering wish had overtaken her again: she longed to see bonny Greenlaw and Hallow once more; that, and partly to collect some moneys on house property derived through the late sea captain, induced her to undertake this latter journey and sojourn in Venturefair. Why in Venturefair Logan could not conceive—not until some considerable time afterwards, when Mr. Petrie Ruddock let out that “she was a strange, accomplished sort of woman whatever, and possibly she had an eye to Balph.” And now in Kirk-wal, she was so far on her way home to two old maiden sisters who still lived in the native town (now in a back going way itself), once so replete with the name of Harry Gordon Baron.

“ I came hither,” concluded Alicia, “ partly to put off the time until the packet sails, and partly, as I said, to take a last look of these fine old ruins that so much impressed me when I first came here a girl on my way to Greenlaw ; and the sight of Margaret in her mournings, and your gay party, brought up, as the saying is, my heart into my mouth, and the days of lang syne. Thus that lurking impulse in the human bosom, of which we feel so much and know so little, which takes the votaries of another faith to the confessional, stirred within me the moment I saw you, and I said, with a deluge of inward tears such as I believe has never been shed before nor since, ‘ I will tell my story to that young man.’ ”

The day by this time had completely overcast. The wind began to whistle

through the broken walls of Earl's Palace, and to shake the groaning trees;* a cold scouring rain fell; standing at the large oriel window, the croon of the neighbouring cathedral might be heard like the brewing boom of a coming storm. But still might be seen the two quaint figures of parson Logan and the plumed lady pacing to and fro on the more sheltered side of the quadrangle, the parson, with his hat well pulled upon his brow, seldom looking up, the lady manifesting occasional inattention to his lecture by casting a pale look at the appearance of the sky; for few are so miserable but that they like to have some respect shown them by the elements, and to get, as one would say, a comfortable passage home.

* In the neighbourhood of the cathedral and Earl's Palace there are some tolerably good-sized trees, sycamore chiefly, the only growing timber in Orkney.

Logan, after debating with himself a little what form of application to give to the story he had just heard, at length took up the subject, and said :

“ You alluded to the practice of confession in the Romish Church. Although the practice, *as practised*, is heretical, and a snare rather than an aid to the conscience, yet is the act of confession itself in some cases salutary. You stated that your last words to Mrs. Deerness were, ‘ Margaret, the Lord will visit you for this.’ Solemn words. Do you still abide by them ?”

“ Sir, I do,” replied the wanderer.

“ When uttering the threat, did you attach any definite meaning to it ? Was there any known defined form of calamity that you foresaw would overtake your offending friend ?”

“ I see, reverend sir,” said Alicia, “ you



have almost as bad an opinion of me as worthy Captain Kith has—you think me a witch after all! Surely, sir, you do not seriously believe that any human being can have the power to *foresee* future calamities, although nothing is easier, sometimes, than by cruel treatment to drive a poor creature to predict such things.”

“You evade the question, woman,” cried Logan—“excuse me, I would say, Miss Baron. I ask you, yea or nay, had you at the time, or since, or have you now, any idea in your own mind what it is that you conceive will befall Mrs. Deerness in the day when, to use the words of your prediction, the Lord will visit her?”

“None whatever,” answered Alicia. “But the passion which would listen to neither reason nor explanation, which in a moment overpassed all bounds of nature,

and thrust me an outcast to the door, may still exist to produce another similar convulsion, and to lay as fair prospects desolate. But if you would know of the manner or against whom the second kindling of her anger may probably be called forth, I cannot tell. You have a fair sister?—and I am told Miss Deerness also is fair?”

“What mean you by those inuendoes?”

“Nothing, my dear sir — you are so very hasty; passing suggestions, nothing more.”

“Do you conceive the time to be nigh?” Logan asked, his brow still clouded by suspicion.

“You are really very importunate, sir. I have spoken in the language of prophetic sympathy with one whose nature I know to be in many respects as precarious and as bruised as my own, however wide the



difference of our outward circumstances ; but I am neither wisher nor prophetess of evil. You have opportunities which I cannot have : watch—watch, I say, and judge for yourself whether the time be nigh or not.”

Here they were rudely interrupted, and an end put to the interview.

“For Wick there, ahoy !” bawled a voice ; and a hoarse, gruff, boatswain-looking figure, in a red tarpaulin, rolled through the entrance archway like a cask in a heavy sea. It was the mate of the packet by which Alicia was to sail, come to summon their lady passenger. “And you’ll please, marm,” said the imperative red monster of the main, speaking as with the voice of a whole deckful of passengers—“you’ll please to look sharp and bear a hand, and cut it as short with the younker

as you can." Had it stopped here—but the marine beast, who had evidently been drinking, added, to Logan's intense disgust, "Dominie! buss the old girl, can't you? and let her go!"

Thus summoned, poor Alicia cast a scared glance at the sky—dark and gloomy it was; then she looked full in the parson's face, and her own filled with the woful tears. "Should Margaret ever speak of me——" But there was no time for adieus. Neptune was bawling to her again to bear a hand or be left behind, and she was obliged to run. As the good books say, her story, it is hoped, has not been told without a moral. "Once inspired me with hopes as palatial, and, it may be, as fallacious, as those you yourself are now cherishing," said Logan, insensibly quoting; and, as he muttered the words,

he cast an exceedingly dissatisfied glance around the shattered precincts. We will pursue his soliloquy no further ; but round, and round, and round the quadrangle, now screened from wind and rain, now partially exposed to it, a full half hour marched the solitary figure of the parson.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DUEL.

AMONG the reminiscences of the day's sight-seeing, Sally Baron was not forgotten. Mrs. Deerness did not permit the incident to overcloud the dinner-party, although Logan suspected she was acting a part. For himself, I have said he was in no exuberant mood. The Englishmen, as their lively manner is, cut jokes: one of them, referring to his interview with Alicia in the palace ruins, asked Logan

whether she was an old flame of his! at which everybody laughed, and our hero was scandalised almost to bursting.

Markus Skeldar arrived in town that afternoon. He had an interview with Captain Coaster of the Guard, and endeavoured still (for Mark in reality relished the affair just as little as James Rollockson) to bring about a pacific accommodation by appealing to Coaster's dread of ridicule; but the incensed captain quickly put a stop to Mark by telling him to take in a reef of that argument.

“The *argumentum ad absurdum*,” he said—the captain was very proud of his few Latin phrases—“founded on their assumption of a disparity of rank, was simply damnable.”

In short, the captain was determined to fight, and the meeting was arranged to come off at eight o'clock in the morning,

at a place called Pitshugh, about half way between Kirkwal and Capperhain Castle, Jan's country seat.

Melethor and his second, Markus Skeldar, had, I suppose, about as much courage as most men; still, it must be a serious thing for men unused to it to turn out at eight in the morning. I do not certainly know, but I have a notion, that when, after the departure of the Belfeur company, they went into the study and locked the door and were looking out the pistols, while ever and anon the laugh of the unconscious family smote upon the ear—I have a notion, I say, that neither of the two gentlemen looked particularly heroic.

At six o'clock in the morning Markus crept into his room with a lighted candle.

“Is it that time?” said M. “What sort of a morning is it?”

“Dark and raining,” answered Mark; and then it was heard battering at the window. Markus seated himself in a chair, and, applying to his finger and thumbs, began making what the boys at school used to call pigeon-holes. I hope the reader understands what is meant. The thumb and digital points are pressed to each other, and the whole held up triangularly before the nose, and this is called looking out at the pigeon-holes. This was a sort of talking, in its way, but of verbal conversation or encouragement, Mr. Skeldar offered none.

He got up and dressed. They ate a morsel of breakfast in the back parlour, but in total silence, for fear of awaking Bruce, whose bedroom was close adjoining.

At seven o'clock they left the house. It was still pitch dark in the town, but once

beyond the suburbs grey daylight began to break through the darkness and drizzle of the morning.

As the curtain rose, the tongues of both were a little unloosened.

"Should I fall, Markus," said the Master.

"The devil !" said Markus Skeldar, in a low, scared voice, "what puts that in your head ?"

"The devil, for anything I know. Should I fall, Mark"—and therewithal his eyes acknowledged the raw morning air—"you will do what you can to make my peace with my mother; Rollockson and Morland will help you. Give my love to them all, and say that I never allowed myself to be dragged into anything with greater reluctance."

"Morland—that's the young New Light parson with the pretty sister," answered

Markus Skeldar, his capacious visage wan, woful, and wandering in the mist of the dawn.

The other laughed a little at his burly friend. "As you say, Mark, with the pretty sister. In case anything goes amiss with me I make you her guardian, to look after her and get a good husband for her—you'll promise?"

"I promise; especially, I hope, as it's not likely to be needed," answered Markus, absently. "What's your particular interest in the lassie?"

"Well, nothing particular; only she's an orphan, and has such winning manners, that I a kind of promised to look out for her."

"I see," said stolid Markus.

Just then he thought he saw a man behind them in the mist. "Do you think he can be after us?" whispers Mark.

“If he suspects what we are after,” said the Master, “like enough; some poor beggar wanting to see the fun.”

The unknown pursuer still continued to be seen behind them in the mist as they plodded over the wet heavy heather, but little further attention was paid to the circumstance. They had their own affairs and their own talk to attend to.

“Where,” said Melethor, “did you say the doctor was to join us?”

“At the Whale’s Tusks,” Mark replied. “He went out to his cousin’s last night on purpose.”

The Cockethat gate do you mean?”

“Yes.”

In Orkney, such manorial entrances are not uncommon, composed of the whale’s jaw set upright in the ground in the form of a rude Gothic arch. The Cockethat portal exhibits tusks that, from their size,

must have belonged to some leviathan king. Seen across the moor in the dark twilight of a winter morning, the upstanding jaw-blades of the deceased plougher of the main (an object of no special regard or interest on ordinary occasions) made some impression on the approaching belligerents—bone of our bone—a protest in the general name of this wide and wandering scheme of existence against the deed they were bent upon. Something of this sort was probably the lesson the bones would or might have preached had not the effect been entirely disconcerted by the dapper figure of the medicus, “Young Voguey of Kirkwal,” standing in the archway on the look-out for his clients, with his hands thrust behind him into the pockets of his great-coat tails.

Dr. V., I think, was about the most cool, consummate puppy I ever met, either in or

out of the profession ; strangers imagined him to be utterly destitute of feeling, and I really hardly know whether it was an excuse or an aggravation of the whelp's affectation that this was not the case ; he was in reality a kindly-affectioned creature enough, but vanity, and some reputation in dealing with the King of Terrors, had hardened him to that extraordinary degree of irreverence that made all decent ordinary people shudder at his talk, and think him but a translated sort of ass.

“ Shocking disagreeable morning,” says Voguey.

Reinforced by the doctor, who kept gabbling the whole way, they pushed forward to the field of action, and arrived on the ground just as the enemy deployed into view from the opposite defile, the place of meeting being a small level bottom or

meadow, enclosed by sandy hillocks all round.

The meeting was conducted with the silence and solemnity usual on such occasions. Coaster bowed stiffly to the adversary's second, Markus; his principal, Jan, behaved with his usual morose and absent nonchalance; he never spoke.

A little dispute arose between the seconds about the distance. Markus was for eighteen paces at the very least. "Twelve, I think, is the usual thing," said Mr. Coaster.

While they were debating this point, Dr. Voguey, putting up his penknife, with which he had been trimming his nails, said:

"Look sharp, gentlemen! If you stand disputing much longer there about distance, we'll all be *distanced*, and the thing

won't come off at all. I see some people coming that I shouldn't wonder were a posse of sheriff's myrmidons." And, in fact, a number of hallooing looking figures were seen in the mist, on the edge of the hollow. They were joined by one or two more, and then a halloo was heard.

"Take your places, gentlemen," cries the doctor.

"I am ready," said the laird of Capper-nairn.

"And I," said Hallow; "a pace or two out or in is neither here nor there."

As the morning was rather too misty to use a handkerchief, it was agreed that Mr. Coaster should give the signal by calling "Once—twice—thrice." "Once" was accordingly called, when the raw morning air getting into his windpipe, compelled the captain to cough to clear his throat. In

short, whether from nervous haste, or misapprehension—or, as some said, intentionally—Beal fired at the first call; and the rescue party, directed to the spot by the flash and report of the pistol, set up a general halloo.

“Really, Mr. Byle,” said the indignant Coaster, “what sort of conduct, sir, is that? Take your other pistol, and don’t let me see you make such a mistake a second time.”

But Markus Skeldar protested against this rather cool mode of rectifying a mistake that might have proved fatal, and, indeed, very nearly did prove fatal, to his friend.

“Not so fast, captain,” said Markus; “time about’s fair play; you have had your shot, and we are entitled to ours, before you talk of another round.”

At the same moment, the laird of Hallow coming forward, with lowered pistol, said (while Cappernairn, still rooted to his post, heard nothing of this interim colloquy) :

“ You are the challengers, Captain Coaster ; you thrust a quarrel upon me, in which I have no particular interest ; at any rate, if I gave provocation, you have had your shot at me, and you are entitled to nothing more : as I do not want his blood, I'll take as good care he shan't have mine ; for by my faith, sir, let me tell you, your first bullet whistled too closely past my ear to tempt me to run any unnecessary risk of his making another such mistake.”

Captain Coaster conceived that, in the strict eye of the duello law, Mr. Melethor Deerness was bound to take his shot.

“ Not *bound*, captain; I believe I am entitled to my shot, if I choose to take it.”

Mr. Coaster observed that, as matters at present stood, the thing was incomplete, and it was a pity it should be incomplete.

“ What, sir !” said the Master, “ would you have me deliberately shoot the man down like a dog, as I should be obliged to do in self-defence, did I consent to your proposed extension ?”

Captain Coaster did not see the necessity for his considering himself so very dead a shot, or for his taking so very deliberate an aim : this was, no doubt, a cool, pleasant, and convincing line of argument to the captain himself, but the other interrupted him.

“ Be pleased, sir, to refer to your principal, and the consequences be upon your head and his. Ask him whether he wants

any more of it, and whether he chooses to run his risk."

The question was put to Beal by his second, but Jan, who did not seem immediately to comprehend the drift of it, returned no answer; and, in the mean time, the sheriff's officers were down upon them. The sergeant of police, to whom, of course, they were all well known, said, with a smile, as he touched his hat, "Were I to do my duty, gentlemen, I would take you, every one of you, into custody; but, as I have arrived in time to put a stop to this meeting before any mischief has been done, my private instructions are to look over it, on your giving your word to keep the peace."

Captain Coaster, though still grumbling at the incompleteness of the thing, was obliged to give his parole as well as the

others, and so the affair ended. When the captain asked Mr. Sergeant of Police how the devil he had got upon their trail, Mr. Sergeant, who was a very polite man as well as clever detective, replied significantly, "You were very busy yesterday, captain."

Mrs. Deerness blamed her son severely. Melethor, she observed, had committed a great sin, the consequences of which might have been frightful, and she trusted he would seek repentance where only it was to be found.

And Logan? What said he to the revival of this pernicious and anti-Christian practice? Was it true, as was said, that he actually took the huff at "our host," and suddenly returned to his pastoral duties, after having consented to stay over to the banquet? That he returned some-

